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The Queen's carriage returns through Whitehall following yesterday's state opening of Parliament.

Photograph: Brian Harris

About turn! Major rewrites the Queen's Speech in mid-debate

Anthony Devine
Political Editor

John Major yesterday performed one of the most dramatic and speedy U-turns of his administration when he agreed – in the middle of a Commons speech – that the Government would after all take charge of its own Bills on paedophiles and stalkers.

The decision was taken during the opening stages of the debate on the Queen's Speech programme for the last, pre-election session of Parliament; a package stripped of all but the bare essentials.

After Tony Blair had repeated Labour's offer of full support for the two uncontroversial Bills, the Prime Minister had hurried consultations with Cabinet colleagues on the government front bench.

Then, replying to the Labour leader's attack on the Queen's speech, Mr Major staggered

MPs in all parts of the House by accepting Mr Blair's offer – accept that, he said. I accept that deal."

For more than 24 hours, ministers had insisted that the creation of a paedophile register – promised by Michael Howard, Home Secretary, in a speech to this month's Conservative Party conference – and the long-awaited Bill on stalking, would have to be carried through the Commons by backbench MPs on the high-risk Private Member's Bill procedure.

But, having been ridiculed for an abdication of responsibility by some politicians and *The Independent*, the Prime Minister for Scotland, told BBC Radio: "I don't know how you can describe this as a U-turn. It is a U-turn on the part of the Opposition to say that they are not going to oppose Government measures concerned with crime."

Hoping for a hat trick, the

shadow Home Secretary, Jack Straw, said last night that Labour was also offering full support for legislation against sex tourism, another of Mr Howard's party conference promises jettisoned from the Queen's Speech.

Mr Major told the Com-

pany that was being stoutly defended by senior ministers at lunchtime yesterday, with Stephen Dorrell, Secretary of State for Health, telling BBC Radio: "It is an absurd proposition to say that we should not use the uncontroversial Bills procedure designed for private members – not to use that to put through uncontroversial Bills."

But the point made all along by Labour and the Liberal Democrats was that if the Bills were so uncontroversial, nothing could be quicker – and surer – than government legislation carried through in Government time.

Donald Dewar, Labour chief whip, said last night: "It is clear that the Prime Minister changed his mind literally mid-speech, forced to give ground and seeing an opportunity for scuttling. It shows a good deal of confusion at the heart of Government."

As for the decision to use the Private Member's Bill proce-

ture, that was being stoutly defended by senior ministers at lunchtime yesterday, with Stephen Dorrell, Secretary of State for Health, telling BBC Radio: "It is an absurd proposition to say that we should not use the uncontroversial Bills procedure designed for private members – not to use that to put through uncontroversial Bills."

Given the decision by the Liberal Democrats to support a total ban, and with some Tories ready to rebel on the issue, the Government faces the real risk of defeat, unless it performs yet another U-turn, closer to the

"So even if a new ceasefire is declared," he told the House, "there will have to be more than soft words to convince the Government ... that it does not represent another tactical device to be abandoned at any convenient moment."

The stalking Bill

Stalkers could face up to five years in jail and an unlimited fine by next year under the "deal" accepted by John Major yesterday.

Anyone using words or behaviour on more than one occasion – twice would be enough – which puts their victim in fear of violence will be at risk of the penalty. A lesser offence, designed to catch words or behaviour causing harassment, alarm or distress, would carry up to six months' imprisonment and/or a £5,000 fine.

In a significant improvement on current criminal law, victims will not have to prove actual intent, and the range of new laws is designed to cover a range of activities from unwanted gifts and telephone calls to physical threats. Courts would also have the power to make a restraining order immediately after convicting a stalker of either of the two criminal offences. Breach of either of these civil orders would be a criminal offence.

The sex offenders Bill

The promised Government measure to clamp down on paedophiles and other sex offenders may be one of the quickest political climbdowns in recent political history, but the Bill that is now set to emerge is likely to be limited.

The measure would create a national register of convicted paedophiles and other sexual offenders. But most of the other proposals in the June White Paper have been put on ice. The suggestion that sex offenders be subject to extended

supervision on release from prison forms part of the Crime (Sentencing) Bill, but three further proposals are on the back-burner. These were that it should be a criminal offence for convicted sex offenders to seek work involving children, that DNA testing be extended to include 3,500 sex offenders convicted prior to new powers in the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act came into force, and supervision of defendants' access to victim statements and photographs.

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Birt-style shake-up for BT

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

BT is to undertake one of the most radical internal shake-ups in its history, with plans to separate its business into as many as 50 trading units, using unpopular reforms implemented by John Birt at the BBC as one of its templates.

Unions fear the internal market programme, which is intended – 12 years after privatisation – to sweep away the last traces of civil service culture, could lead to whole chunks of the company's operations being hived off if they fail to meet exacting performance targets.

Professor Collinge and his team analysed the biochemical properties of prion proteins associated with sporadic and acquired forms of CJD, new variant CJD, and BSE transmitted to mice, cats, and macaque monkeys.

According to their report in today's issue of *Nature*, they discovered a characteristic molecular signature in new variant CJD which was also present in

Death of a soccer fan
Matthew Harding, Chelsea FC's multi-millionaire vice-chairman, who died in a helicopter crash on Tuesday, saw life in black and white. He adored football – investing £5m in Chelsea in 1994 but had a feud with Ken Bates, the club's chairman. He went to police school, yet died happily with the fans, drinking at the same pub on the King's Road in London's Notting Hill. He was a City book-fixer, but a supporter of Lazarus – a much-loved man of contradictions. Page 3

QUICKLY

Liz Hunt

Editor

British scientists today publish the strongest evidence so far that "mad cow" disease has been transmitted to humans through infected beef.

EU officials last night warned that the new findings ruled out even a partial lifting of the beef export ban in the foreseeable future and said that Britain must honour its obligation to slaughter all high-risk cattle.

Scientists from the Imperial College School of Medicine at St. Mary's Hospital, London, have shown that a protein associated with the new variant of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (vCJD) identified in humans earlier this year and tentatively linked with eating infected beef, closely resembles that seen in cattle with Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), and in other animals infected with BSE. The protein

known as a prion, is quite distinct from that found in other forms of CJD. The research could lead to a new test to confirm the new variant of CJD.

These new findings are the first experimental evidence that the appearance of this fatal brain disease in humans is linked with the BSE epidemic in

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12 cases of the new CJD have been confirmed so far since March with two more suspected cases under investigation.

Professor John Collinge, a consultant neurologist who led the research, said yesterday: "The Government has been working on the assumption that BSE is a human pathogen [infectious agent] and this work strengthens that hypothesis."

A Department of Health spokeswoman called the findings "persuasive" but not conclusive.

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significant shorts

Americans get access to UK tax records

The Government has gone back on promises never to send confidential tax records abroad because of fears that a £200m self-assessment computer system will crash.

Labour is demanding assurances that taxpayers' private information will be safeguarded, but ministers have already decided that the privatised system will be accessed by telephone from sites in America and Australia.

The disclosure is made in today's issue of *Computer Weekly*. It has been passed a copy of a secret Inland Revenue memo to an unnamed minister, thought to have been Michael Jack, Financial Secretary to the Treasury, advising him that sending information abroad represents a fundamental change in the Inland Revenue's security policy and procedures.

It asks for permission to revise its security policy and its contract with the main contractor, the American information technology company EDS, and suggests planting a Parliamentary question that would allow the changes to be announced.

Last week, a question was asked of Mr Jack who said EDS would have 24-hour support from its database subcontractor, the American Oracle. He added that this would "necessitate specialist staff either in the UK, or exceptionally, in Oracle facilities abroad, having access to copies of batches of taxpayers' records".

Steve Boggan

More employees killed at work

The number of fatal injuries to workers excluding the self-employed is expected to rise slightly for the first time since the beginning of the decade, the Health and Safety Commission said in its annual report. However, the total number of fatal injuries in the year to March, including the self-employed, is expected to be the same as the previous 12 months at 272.

Clare Garner

Pets girl jailed

A former pet-shop assistant who left a rabbit and five gerbils to starve to death was jailed for two weeks by Nottingham magistrates. Christine Bescoby, 23, was also banned from keeping animals for 10 years. Bescoby, who worked in West Bridgford, Nottinghamshire, admitted cruelty.

Mother begs IRA to spare her son's life

A Belfast woman has made a desperate plea to the IRA to lift a death sentence on her son.

Jean Kennedy appealed to Direct Action Against Drugs, widely believed to be a cover for the Provisional IRA. A sentence was imposed on son Paul, 21, a week ago after allegations of drug dealing.

She found out about the death sentence a week ago when graffiti was painted on walls near her home accusing her son of being a drug dealer. "I had no other choice other than to speak out, they threatened my child's life," she said. "Once your name goes up on the walls that's it. I had to go public to let people know that my son's not a drug dealer."

Nancy Greeley, of the campaigning group Outright, said: "It's taken a brave woman to do what she is doing. She is a very frightened lady."

A 17-year-old youth was in hospital in Belfast after being beaten by a gang armed with nail-studded clubs in what was apparently a paramilitary attack.

Supermarket sold old pies

The supermarket company Kwik Save was ordered to pay more than £7,000 in fines and costs for selling meat pies, quiches and pasta that were past their sell-by date at one of its stores.

An assistant manager at the shop in Coleford, Gloucestershire, tried to hide some of the out-of-date sausage and onion pies as trading standards officers checked the fresh food fridge, the town's magistrates were told.

The prosecution claimed the company later produced "bogus and fabricated" documents to try to prove that regular checks had been made on food in the cabinet. Kwik Save pleaded guilty.

Wales talks to Europe

Plans by the EU to spend £5.6m over two years on promoting Europe's minority languages have been hailed as a big boost for Welsh culture. Eluned Morgan, MEP for Mid and West Wales, told the European Parliament: "It will provide an enormous opportunity to take Welsh culture to the rest of Europe through support for translation of Welsh books."

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Shephard to act on crisis pupils

Fran Abrams
Education Correspondent

an apparent breakdown of discipline there.

Calderdale Council has already sent a report on the troubled Halifax school to ministers, but last night its chairman of governors said he had been given no indication that an announcement on its future was about to be made. He said he feared that the governing body might be suspended.

The school, which was opened less than two years ago after a merger, had been facing increasing discipline problems since the beginning of this year. In March, 13-year-old Sarah

Taylor was excluded for pushing a teacher who tried to stop her from fighting with her boyfriend. Her parents appealed against the decision and won, but were forced to withdraw the girl after staff threatened to strike if she returned.

Last week a further crisis blew up after teachers complained of no fewer than three serious assaults by pupils. Talks between unions and governors brought no solution, and the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers is now balloting on strike action.

Staff say that up to one in every 10 of their 600 pupils is "unteachable" and that some drastic action should be taken. They believe that if more children had been excluded from the school at an earlier stage the problem might have been contained.

The head, Karen Stanfield, has resigned along with one of her two deputies, complaining of disappointment and exhaustion. They are expected to leave at the end of term.

The local authority, school governors and unions have continued to negotiate, and yes-

terday the governors said a number of measures were being proposed to alleviate the situation. The council has promised extra resources and more support for the school.

Last night the chairman of governors, the Rev Stan Brown, said he would be disappointed if the press were informed about the decision before staff at the school had been told. "We have been working with the local authority to put together a package of measures. Whether Mrs Shephard has taken into account what is being suggested before making a judgement I

would be interested to know."

"It may well mean that the present governing body is suspended," he said.

Brian Garvey, regional executive member of the NASUWT, said staff at the school would welcome any help they were offered.

"We don't want people going in to see what's happening. We have told them what's happening. We want people to come in and tell us what to do. If Gillian Shephard wanted to roll up her sleeves and sort things out the staff would cheer her through the door," he said.

After 217 days of 'sheer hell', 2,000 lobby Parliament to say they've had enough



Photograph: Peter Macdiarmid

Angry farmers come to Westminster

Stephen Goodwin

Cautioned by their leaders to "do nothing silly", more than 2,000 farmers yesterday ringed the Palace of Westminster in one of the biggest mass lobbies of recent times.

From the Welsh hills, the Cheshire plain and backwaters such as Burgh-le-Marsh in Lincolnshire, they took a rare day off from the farm to demonstrate their anger at the Government's handling of BSE.

David Redgate of Conwy Grey Farm, Brinsley in Nottinghamshire, was typical. After losing thousands of pounds on beef bulls sold at auction he had come to London to demand a change of policy and the resignation of Douglas Hogg, the Minister of Agriculture.

"Maybe it is a token gesture, but after what farmers have been through I felt we had to come and complain," he said. Glancing across the stocky men

with weathered faces who filled Westminster Central Hall, he added that it looked as if most families had "sent Dad to make the protest while the sons stay at home to do the work".

There was a groan from the hall when Sir David Naish, president of the National Farmers' Union, alerted farmers to the disclosure of new evidence

linking the new strain of Creutzfeld-Jakob disease in humans to BSE in beef.

Farmers had been through

"217 days of sheer hell" since 20 March, when ministers first announced the probable link, he said. Sir David, who later delivered prime beef to 10 Downing Street, called for more support for the beef industry

and hill farmers - hit hard in this autumn's cattle sales - and for a speedier cull of older cattle.

Mr Hogg has promised the slaughter of cattle over 30 months old will be stepped up to 50,000 a week. Officials expect to hit this target next week but it will take until March to clear the backlog of condemned animals.

But the message that the farmers most wanted to get home was the imperative of re-opening export markets for their beef. Repeated signals by Mr Hogg that there would be no selective cull of cattle was seen in the rest of Europe as breaking the Florence Agreement on a phased lifting of the export ban, Sir David said.

Underlining the NFU council's extraordinary vote of no confidence in Mr Hogg, he warned: "Let him be in no doubt where he stands with the farming community - at rock bottom."

Sir David said he was angry that some traders and dealers had exploited the plight of those caught up in the mismanagement of the scheme.

An NFU member from the north-east said renderers and slaughterhouses were holding farmers to ransom. "Spivs, auctioneers and dealers are taking a child to be placed with a child," he said.

The court was told Ryan's body was discovered at Mills's home on 18 February. Nicholas Haggan, prosecuting, said Ryan's mother had been in a relationship with Scammell in 1993, but they had split up before his birth. She was unable to cope with the child and Ryan was placed in care. "So it came about that social services of Hampshire County Council made arrangements for the child to be placed with his father, who lived in the area." Scammell arranged for Mills to look after Ryan at her home.

A spokesman for Hampshire Social Services said an independent review carried out at the request of Hampshire County Council Social Services "found no single agency or individual was to blame" but "identified a series of shortcomings in ... communications and procedures". She said the recommendations of an internal review were being considered.

Combat knives evil, says head's widow

James Cusick

Combat knives, easily bought over the counter in specialist shops throughout Britain, were yesterday branded symbols of evil by Frances Lawrence, whose campaign for a good citizenship crusade attracted cross-party backing.

Mrs Lawrence, the widow of murdered headmaster Philip Lawrence, widened her appeal by demanding a ban on military-style knives.

In an interview on BBC Television's *Here and Now* programme last night, Mrs Lawrence refused to accept nothing could be done to outlaw the weapons. "Sometimes it seems too difficult to get anything done, but it's nonsense to say that nothing can be changed."

With the government facing continuing public pressure to ban handguns completely, rather than the partial ban announced last week after the publication of Lord Cullen's Dunblane report, Mrs Lawrence's statement is likely to renew calls for a knife ban to be included in future legislation.

Last year her husband was stabbed to death outside his

weeks." Talking about coming to terms with her husband's death, she said it was the manner of his death, the violence, that was very difficult to come to terms with. "I don't think I'll ever come to terms with that and I think that we have to sort out this growth of violence and it has to be stopped."

Knives, she said, were a physical symbol of evil. And on shops that openly display knives for sale, she added: "You see violence in a window, you see it on display. It is quite unbelievable that these shops exist and that is one of my primary concerns."

She claimed there was a link between images of violence and actual incidents of violence, although such a relationship has never been academically proved.

"We know whatever the statistics tell us that there is a link between the violence that is bombarded at our children and the violence that some of them go out and inflict."

Last week, Learco Chinadamo, 16, was convicted of the murder of Mr Lawrence and ordered to be detained during Her Majesty's Pleasure. Queen's Speech pages 6 and 7

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Chelsea in mourning as vice-chairman's helicopter crashes on way home from match



Young Chelsea supporters at Stamford Bridge yesterday to mourn the man who was regarded as the club's saviour

Photograph: PA

Death of a £750m football fan

Michael Streeter

Eight-year-old Jody Craig was in tears as she left her flowers at the entrance to Chelsea Football Club's stadium.

"I had just got his autograph," she sobbed, as she stood wearing her team's yellow away strip with her father. "I am so upset." Her distraught father Stewart added: "We have come to pay our last respects. He did so much for this club."

Their mood echoed that of the many fans who turned up at the Stamford Bridge ground in Fulham, west London, yesterday, as news of vice-chairman and multi-millionaire insurance businessman Mr Harding's death in a helicopter crash filtered through. The accident killed four others on the aircraft, including the pilot.

The fans included the chairman of rival Premier League team Wimbledon, Ken Bates, who expressed his sorrow and announced that the

new north stand would be named in memory of the vice-chairman.

Mr Harding, an ebullient character who enjoyed drinking with the fans, held 24.97 per cent of the shares in Chelsea Village, the public company that owns the club. The value of the shares fell 12p as news came in of his death.

As supporters and friends digested the consequences, an investigation was launched by inspectors from the Air Accidents Investigation Branch of the Department of Transport.

The Eurocopter Twin Squirrel helicopter crashed at 11pm on Tuesday in a field near Middlewich, Cheshire.

Mr Harding, 42, who was separated from his wife Ruth by whom he had four children, and had moved in with his lover Vicki Bramall by whom he has a daughter, had been watching Chelsea lose 2-1 to Bolton

Wanderers in a Coca-Cola Cup tie at Bolton's Burnden Park ground.

The helicopter disintegrated on impact and caught fire. One theory was that the aircraft hit power lines, but they appeared intact at the scene.

However, the nature of the crash apparently gave no time for the pilot to put out an emergency message.

The helicopter owners, Aeromega, said the twin-engined Eurocopter had "good" safety record.

Bolton millionaire and friend Jonathan Warburton saw Mr Harding shortly before the crash.

He said the Chelsea vice-chairman had been philosophical about his team's defeat. "I patted him on the back and said, 'See you next time.' I think I said, 'Have a safe trip home.'

Away from his football interests Mr Harding built a rep-

utation in the City as chairman of the reinsurance company Benfield Group. His personal fortune was estimated at £170m.

The other passengers killed in the crash were later named by police as Raymond Deane, 43, of Camberley, Surrey; John Bauldie, 47, of Richmond, Surrey; and Tony Burridge, of Wimbledon, south London.

The pilot was named as Michael Goss, 38, of Wilton, Salisbury, Wiltshire.

Mr Burridge was a director of Benfield Ellinger, a subsidiary of Mr Harding's Benfield group.

Mr Bauldie was a friend and former journalist on *O* magazine and expert on the music of Bob Dylan — one of Mr Harding's other great passions.

A newspaper reporter covering the story crash was killed yesterday in a road accident.

Kate Alderson, 28, North-

west staff correspondent of *The Times*, was involved in a crash with another car near the scene of the helicopter tragedy in Cheshire.

Police said she died in Leighton Hospital, Crewe, 90 minutes after the accident.

The driver of the other car involved, from Sandbach, Cheshire, was being treated at the same hospital with head injuries.

James MacManus, managing editor of *The Times*, said Ms Alderson, from Co Durham, had been on the paper for four years.

"She graduated from Manchester University and knew the area well. She had a glittering career in front of her, she was very popular with everyone here, and we are all in shock."

A spokeswoman for Cheshire police said the accident happened on the A530 near Northwich at 10am.

Loss will not affect club's plans

Glenn Moore
Football Correspondent

The supporters who gathered at Stamford Bridge yesterday were mourning more than an uncommonly beloved football vice-chairman. They were also attempting to come to terms with the possible loss of Chelsea's bright new future.

Chelsea's board met in emergency session yesterday as the club tried to assess the full implications of Matthew Harding's death. After the meeting, Ken Bates, the club's chairman, insisted the tragedy "does not and will not" affect his plans for the future of the club. Mr Harding had injected £26.5m into Chelsea, and Mr Bates said he had put "the promised financial commitments in place".

Mr Bates said: "This will allow us to move on to the next phase in achieving his and every Chelsea fan's dream of having a world-class team and a world-class stadium. The board feels his memory will be best served by achieving those objectives."

Since Mr Harding became involved with the west London club, it has moved from the ranks of also-rans towards the game's elite. World-famous names such as Ruud Gullit, have been attracted to the team, while the stadium began a long-overdue regeneration.

This was almost entirely due to the unlikely combination of Mr Harding and Mr Bates. It was Mr Bates, a 64-year-old entrepreneur who placed the advertisement in the *Financial Times* appealing for investors which Mr Harding answered three years ago.

It was a stormy marriage. Mr Bates, chairman since 1981, may have saved the club from liquidation, but Mr Harding — an effervescent, lifelong supporter — soon supplanted him in the affections of many fans.

The honeymoon period was followed by an acrimonious separation during which both parties made full use of the tabloid press. Harsh words were exchanged, but earlier this year the pair kissed and made up.

A man of surprises in black, white and blue

Chris Blackhurst

There was no half-way house with Matthew Harding. If he liked you he would speak to you; if he did not he would not.

That black and white view governed his approach to life, to making money, to football, to politics. During his feud with Ken Bates, the Chelsea chairman, he asked a friend to advise him on how best to end the row. The friend discovered that one thing none of Harding's advisers had ever done was to actually talk to Bates, so he did.

When Harding found out, the friend quickly realised why none of the previous advisers had done the same. Harding believed at him, "are you working for me or working for him?"

Until Harding invested £5m in Chelsea Football Club in 1994, he was an unknown, a young guy who had made many millions from one of the more obscure aspects of City business, the convoluted reinsurance market. It seemed fitting that Chelsea, with its flashy, big talk reputation should be the club for a 42-year-old, cocky, multi-millionaire from the not so posh side of the City. End of story.

Soon it became obvious to those who met him that this was wrong. He talked about his politics, not the traditional blinckered Toryism of the self-made man at the top of football but socialism. He was avowedly pro-Labour and pro-Tony Blair, feeling the party would drop its suspicion of business success and once in power, would promote education and training, something he felt strongly about.

He was at odds with the milieu in which he moved. How many other football bosses or City wheeler-dealers openly boasted of their willingness to pay taxes?

His love for Chelsea had held firm through 30 years of



Mixing it: Harding was a complex man

Photograph: PA

banned from the director's box and the club car park. Relations were so bad that the only thing the pair did not do was square up to each other in the car park. A peace of sorts was agreed but Harding still smoldered. He told one would-be author of a book about Chelsea recently on his belief that the chairman's desire to redevelop the ground was hampering progress on the pitch. Their spat soon became personal and was pure theatre at one stage, Harding was

no account to talk to Bates.

Then there was his donation to Labour. The fact that Chelsea's two best-known fans, David Mellor and John Major were Tories, did not bother him a jot. Neither did they take it badly for this was something they could not influence.

Meeting a true fan, page 32

They needed to. Mr Harding owns the land Chelsea play on, Mr Bates the parent company, Chelsea Village. Mr Harding has provided funding for ground development and new players, Mr Bates has master-minded its stock market listing.

Trading in the shares which slipped yesterday, may have to be suspended while the repercussions of Mr Harding's death are assessed.

The land, for which Chelsea pays Mr Harding £1.5m rent per year, cost him £16.5m. He has also loaned nearly £10m to the club. It now depends how secure that money is — the £5m loan for the North Stand, now renamed

after Mr Harding, is repayable in 2008.

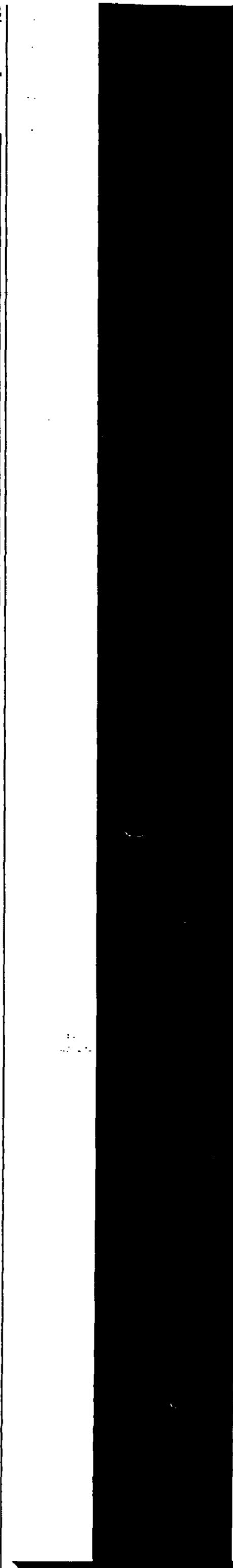
Mr Harding was a shrewd financier and he was devoted to Chelsea, but even if there is provision for the club in his will, it is unlikely to match the amount he might have invested had he lived.

Mr Bates may reflect with a bitter irony upon a comment he made last year in defence of his plan to turn Stamford Bridge into a multi-function development: "I believe you cannot rely on one man's affluence, the club has to be run as a business," he said.

They had their differences but, yesterday, Mr Bates' presence gave him no pleasure at all.

It was a stormy marriage. Mr Bates, chairman since 1981, may have saved the club from liquidation, but Mr Harding — an effervescent, lifelong supporter — soon supplanted him in the affections of many fans.

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Yes: Regions need good modern art

Marianne Macdonald
Arts Correspondent

Does a small gallery in the Lake District have the right to a large lottery grant to buy a painting by a "modern Old Master" such as Lucian Freud? That was the question the art world was asking yesterday as the Abbot Hall Art Gallery fought to raise the money to buy *Portrait on Grey Cover*, a powerful oil of a woman lying on a bed, by the Berlin-born artist. Yesterday it had raised only one-third of its £750,000 price, but with the original deadline for payment of midnight last night extended at the last minute to Monday night, there seemed to be a glimmer of hope. But that will depend on whether the lottery distribution bodies can be persuaded to change their rules on the purchase of modern art in what has clearly emerged as an exceptional case. *Portrait on Grey Cover* is presently on show in an selling exhibition at the New York gallery owned by Freud's dealer, Bill Acquavella, who has at least two other collectors ready to snap it up. The oil had previously been included, hot off the canvas, in the Kendal gallery's summer retrospective of Freud, which had 26,000 visitors. But when it applied to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a grant towards the purchase price, the gallery, an independent charitable trust, was told it could not qualify because the painting was less than 20 years old. The HLF sent it to the Arts Council's lottery fund. But it turned out that the Arts Council could only give grants for new commissions. The Freud painting, although just completed, fell between the two stools.



Portrait on Grey Cover by Lucian Freud and (below) Edward King, director of Abbot Hall Art Gallery



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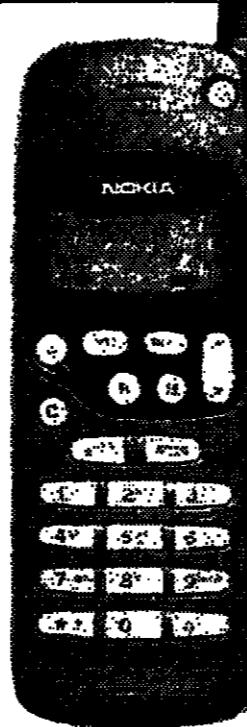
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David Lister

the figurative painter Lucian Freud.

Art is the name of an excellent new play in London's West End. Its real star is an enormous all-white canvas, supposedly white lines on a white background, though of course these are impossible to see.

The arguments that ensue over the intrinsic worth or otherwise of this (highly expensive) painting are among the sort of arguments the Heritage Lottery Fund wants to avoid in its 20-year rule.

Much that is acclaimed but controversial much that is rubbish but acclaimed is admittedly more than 20 years old. But at least a couple of decades should see a weeding out of most of the fashion-chasing media darling artists, the hyped pictures and faddish movements.

A 20-year rule, argued the fund trustees under Lord Rothschild when the lottery rules were being drawn up, was a reasonable time in which to assess the artist's significance and the significance of the work itself.

Lord Rothschild said last night: "It seemed a reasonable period of time to get a balance and focus about what would become heritage. We were even nervous about as small a period as 20 years. Certainly it should also apply to great painters of the day. Painters can change a great deal in their lifetimes, and later work is not always consistent with their great years, though as it happens Lucian Freud is at the height of his powers as a painter. A period of reflection can only be helpful."

Much has been made in the last few years about trends in "video art" and in the New York contemporary art scene. But Robert Hughes, the notable art critic whose retrospective series *American Visions* is about to be shown on BBC television, told me: "I don't now think there is any video art of lasting worth and American art at present is in the doldrums."

In the visual arts perhaps more than any other art form reputations can rise and fall in a remarkably short time. In comparison 20 years is an age.

In addition, private benefactors such as the advertising mogul Maurice Saatchi have in the past stepped in to buy works by leading names, though these names are often of a more avant-garde persuasion than

needs to change its rules it is the Arts Council, which should be allowed to use lottery money to gamble on contemporary art, and not the Heritage Lottery Fund. Freud may be part of our artistic heritage, but that does not mean that his newest works are necessarily among his best. If heritage is to have any meaning it must be that a created work cannot be considered part of the cultural heritage until it has achieved either critical or public acclaim over a long period, transcending fads and fashions.

Even David Barrie, the campaigning director of the National Art Collections Fund, which has given £75,000



The artist Lucian Freud

towards keeping the Freud

painting in the country, and is

frustrated with the confusion

over lottery funding by Heritage

and Arts Council funding

bodies, is prepared to defend

the 20-year rule.

"Contemporary art is a very

tricky area," he says. "It often

takes a little time to establish

whether a work of art is going

to establish heritage status.

That's particularly true with

avant-garde work. Damien

Hirst for example. But Freud is

a living classic. One knows his

work will be part of the heritage

very soon. What we need is for

the Heritage Lottery Fund to

have a 20-year rule but have the

courage to make exceptions to

it for contemporary works of

outstanding quality."



The Primary Care Bill

What it does

Wider choice for patients, better targeted services and greater freedom and flexibility for doctors, dentists, and pharmacists. The prospect of big retailers such as Asda and Sainsbury providing "branded" primary care for the NHS has been raised but dismissed by the Department of Health as "unlikely though not impossible". Ministers prefer to emphasise the development of super-surgeries and cottage hospitals offering a wide range of care and access and the professions agree - as long as there is new money for them.

Political punch

Labour's warnings that the Bill's proposals "tear at the very roots of the public-service ethos of general practice" are somewhat diluted by the enthusiastic reception given to the White Paper by doctors, dentists, pharmacists and managers.

Real importance

A considered and consensual approach to the development of primary care in response to ever greater demand.

The Social Security Fraud Bill

What it does

Will enable cross-checks to be made of Inland Revenue, benefit claims and VAT returns, opening data for the first time to disclosure to social security officers. Also sets up a new inspectorate to monitor anti-fraud work in housing and council tax benefits by local authorities, with powers to force councils to tighten up.

Political punch

Attempts to put Labour on the spot over welfare fraud but Labour say it misses the point; private landlords are getting away with housing benefit fraud running to £2bn through organised crime.

Real importance

May catch more small fry but big fish likely to go free. Also raises long-term civil rights issue over disclosure of data.

The Education Bill

What it does

Plans to increase school selection where parents want it, give more freedom to grant-maintained schools, tighten rules on school discipline and raise standards through testing for five year-olds and target-setting for all schools.

Political punch

Highlights Labour's embarrassment over selection and opting out. Harriet Harman sent her son to a grammar school and Tony Blair sent his to a grant-maintained school.

Real importance

None, in the case of selection, because parents do not usually want it. Extra testing and target-setting will give better measures of how well schools are doing.

Legislation for the long-term - Major fury at 'lectures' from Blair

John Rentoul
Political Correspondent

The Prime Minister responded furiously to Tony Blair's attack on his government for "fracturing" society, saying he was "not inclined to accept sanctimonious lectures" from the Labour leader.

Opening five days of Commons debate on yesterday's Queen's Speech, Mr Blair said: "If our society is torn and fractured as it is, I ask who in part fractured it?" Mr Blair pointed at the Government benches. "They did."

He went on: "All the fine words of ministers will not mend it. We will mend this fractured society when those that fractured it, those that said that there was no such thing as society are no longer governing our society."

John Major replied, in an exasperation which could herald a bitterly hostile parliamentary session lasting until a May election: "I think any politician should be very cautious about cloaking himself in righteousness."

'We will mend this fractured society when those that fractured it are no longer governing our society'

"I don't know how the Right Honourable Gentleman can disclaim responsibility for faults in society today when his own Labour Party has consistently championed every fashionable, politically correct cause that has undermined our traditional way of life and opposed every measure we have taken to redress the balance."

According to advisers, the Prime Minister was incensed by press coverage suggesting that proposals by Francis Lawrence, widow of the murdered headmaster Philip Lawrence, were part of a left-wing "moral crusade" led by the churches and the Labour Party.

It is understood Mr Major met Mrs Lawrence some weeks ago to discuss her views and feels that Mr Blair has attempted to adopt her "manifesto" late in the day. Mr Major allowed his irritation to show when he said: "Let me remind you that it was Labour councils that banned competitive sports in schools, undermined traditional teaching approaches and sponsored every anti-establishment pressure group they could find."

And he responded to Labour heckling on the question of personal choice by launching a personal attack on Mr Blair. When a Labour MP shouted, "Tell that to the parents", Mr

THE DEBATE

Major replied: "Well, some parents have noted that [the widening of choice] for themselves. Some parents have moved their children from high-spending Islington." Mr Blair's son attends a grant-maintained school eight miles from his home in Islington.

Mr Major went on: "If there are problems in society, the Right Honourable Gentleman might look at poor-performing Labour authorities as one of the roots of those problems." This picked up the theme of Conservative barracking of Mr Blair on education, when Tory MPs shouted that it was Labour that ran education authorities up and down the country.

On the Government's record on crime, the health service, the economy and education, Mr Blair said: "It is as if they had just landed from Mars, as if they had been in exile for 17 years and had just discovered how shabby things are." He said cutting dole payments to 16- and 17-year-olds, homelessness and cuts in training places contributed to a fractured society.

But he provoked uproar on the Tory benches when he went on: "When that part of our society can afford to takes private health care, sends their children to private schools, shuns public transport - yes, because they cannot tolerate the waiting times, the mixed quality, the degeneration of public transport. Doesn't that contribute to the fracturing of our society?"

He attacked cuts in top income tax rates and rises in tax on fuel which caused old-age pensioners to pause before lighting the fire.

Mr Major accused the Leader of the Opposition of making a "brazen speech", contrasting Mr Blair's "sweeping generalisations" with his search for "practical solutions often to complex problems". He said: "To oversimplify is to deceive and not to engage with the real problems." He said Mr Blair had been "evasive and misleading about his policies".

But it was the Tory backbencher Marion Roe, MP for Bracknell and chairman of the all-party health select committee, who succeeded in forcing Mr Blair on to the defensive. She intervened in his speech to ask if he would match the Prime Minister's promise to the Tory conference in Bournemouth this month to spend more on the NHS in real terms every year.

Those commitments have been shown to be utterly worthless, Mr Blair responded. Proclaiming the record of the last Labour government, he said that, if the Tories want to "pit their commitment to the NHS against ours, let them call a general election and let the people



decide". Mrs Roe's intervention followed Mr Blair's recitation of his charges against the government's health policy. "Drift has never been more in evidence or more damaging than in the National Health Service," he said. But the Labour leader is believed to be having private discussions with Gordon Brown, the shadow chancellor, about how to respond to Mr Major's pledge, which was identical to the pledge before the last election, which has been kept. Labour MPs say it is "inconceivable" they would not match the promise, but Mr Blair avoided

a direct answer. In his speech, Mr Major sought to play down expectations of tax cuts. He said the "meaty" Queen's Speech would be followed by a "prudent" Budget next month.

"If we can safely cut taxes, we will. If we cannot, we will not," he said, but repeated:

"If we cannot, we will not." Paddy Ashdown, leader of the Liberal Democrats, responded: "If the Chancellor does cut taxes this Autumn, he will be doing so for purely political purposes ... If Labour cannot find the courage to oppose them, they are colluding with

"If we cannot, we will not." Mr Ashdown added: "It was a Queen's Speech revealed a government in its tormented twilight days, it is this rag-bag of irrelevant measures. This is a speech driven more by what will wrong-foot the Opposition, than what is right for the country."

Measures to improve discipline in schools will include giving them the power to put pupils in detention without their parents' consent and forcing every school to draw up a policy on the subject.

There will be measures to deal with a growing crisis over exclusions. Those will include

more flexibility for schools on the number of days for which they can temporarily remove a child and more rights for schools to be represented when parents appeal against exclusions.

Labour claims many of these measures as its own, along with

plans for "base-line" testing of five-year-olds, for schools to set targets for improving standards and for wholesale Ofsted inspections of local authorities.

The Opposition will, however,

attack plans to allow pri-

mary-age children to receive

help with private school fees if

their parents are on low in-

comes. Labour wants to abol-

ish the Assisted Places Scheme

for secondary schools and to use

the money to reduce class sizes

in state schools.

Others accused the Govern-

ment of using the Bill to play

politics in the run-up to the

election. Its commitment to

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Labour's embarrassment over

the decision of Harriet Harman,

the party's social services

spokeswoman, to send her son

to a selective school.

Don Foster, the Liberal De-

mocrat education spokesman,

said the Bill was "all politics and no policy".

GP 'retailers' to offer their own brand of care

Liz Hunt
and Colin Brown

The Primary Care Bill will consolidate the position of family doctors, dentists and pharmacists and the services they provide as the jewels in the crown of the National Health Service, health ministers have promised. Labour says the Bill will open the service to the horrors of commercialisation.

At its heart is a change in the way GPs are employed. It will provide opportunities for individuals or organisations, including private retailers or trust hospitals, to employ doctors and establish their own brand of primary-care practice, funded by the NHS.

Such "practice-based" con-

HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

tracts would speed the growth of super-surgeries or cottage hospitals, in a move designed to ease the burden on acute hospitals, and their costs. The health centres of the 21st century would offer services ranging from minor surgery, X-rays and physiotherapy to health education.

Patients would be able to consult a variety of health-care professionals who will assume a wider role in the primary-care service and greater responsibility for patients, leaving GPs to focus on the most serious and complex cases.

Under present law, every GP is an independent contractor with the Secretary of State for

Health and must provide core services, which rules out "flexibility", the key to the forthcoming Bill.

Another significant development in primary care will be proposals for a single budget for general medical services, hospital and community health services and prescribing which will, in effect, allow some funding GPs to become "mini-health authorities" with a legally binding contract to provide all services for their patients. This has been hailed by the National Association of Funding Doctors as the most exciting and radical idea in the forthcoming Bill.

Doctors in particular have applauded the cautious approach of Stephen Dorrell, Secretary of State for Health, who has said that every development will be tested in voluntary pilot schemes and fully evaluated before any permanent, widespread change. The entrepreneurs among the professions could seize the initiative, he said. But the British Medical Association and the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts have warned that without investment in primary care, the Government's plans will fail.

The Social Security Bill to tackle fraud being introduced by the secretary of state, Peter Lilley, was said by the Opposition spokeswoman Harriet Harman to have missed its £2bn target. She announced her own measures to outflank the Government.

The Bill will establish an agency to put pressure on local authorities to curb housing benefit fraud and will give social security officials new powers to cross-check income tax and VAT returns with benefit claims.

Attacking the measure as "too little, too late", Ms Harman said the Government had been forced to act by the calls for action by Frank Field, Labour chairman of the cross-party Commons Select Committee on Social Security.

"Local authorities should have the power to refuse to pay direct to private landlords in all but exceptional circumstances," she said. "Local authorities should also provide details of payments to landlords direct to the Inland Revenue to ensure that they pay income tax."

Others accused the Government of using the Bill to play politics in the run-up to the election. Its commitment to selection will separate it from the other main parties and highlight Labour's embarrassment over the decision of Harriet Harman, the party's social services spokeswoman, to send her son to a selective school.

Don Foster, the Liberal Democrat education spokesman, said the Bill was "all politics and no policy".

The Crime (Sentencing) Bill**What it does:**

Home Secretary Michael Howard's flagship law and order measure under which serious, dangerous and persistent offenders would be jailed more often and for longer periods, leaving little scope for judges to fit punishments to particular crimes.

Political punch:

Government has real hopes of putting Labour on the spot. Who, after all could oppose a life sentence for a man who has raped twice? So far, has only been the judges and penal reformers who have voiced strong opposition.

Real importance:

Unless made more flexible, could backfire because of fewer guilty pleas and wrongful acquittals, while prisons will face overcrowding and funding crisis.

The Firearms Amendment Bill**What it does:**

Post-Dunblane ban on all higher-calibre handguns above .22, with less powerful weapons confined to gun clubs under stringent security. There would be tighter police licensing procedures and a clampdown on mail-order.

Political punch:

Could rebound on Tories if Labour and Lib Dems secure total ban in face of government attempt to dictate its own backbenchers.

Real importance:

Cannot entirely remove the risk of future tragedies, as stabbing of headmaster Philip Lawrence shows, nor stop criminals using unlicensed weapons. But 80 per cent of legally-held weapons will be taken out of circulation.

The Police Bill**What it does:**

Would set up a national police unit to fight organised crime and a criminal records vetting agency to which employers and workers would have access. Would also put police bugging on a statutory basis.

Political punch:

One of the few areas where there appears to be a measure of cross-party agreement, but trouble in prospect over the agency, particularly over giving access to information about police suspicions.

Real importance:

There are question-marks over the civil liberties implications, but national crime squad widely thought to be right response to organised crime.



Labour claims ideas as its own

or campaigning for the spring?

Outlawing guns will be hard fight

Jason Benetto

Crime Correspondent

The proposal to outlaw 80 per cent of handguns will be one of the most fiercely fought Bills in the coming months after the Government refused yesterday to cave in to pressure for an all-out ban on pistols.

The Firearms Amendment Bill, which was the Government's response to the Dunblane massacre, would outlaw all handguns above .22 calibre, and confine the use of the remaining, less powerful pistols to gun clubs, which would be obliged to take the most stringent security precautions.

Support for the Bill is on a knife edge, with the Government virtually certain to impose a three-line whip to bring dissenting backbenchers onside. However Labour will put down amendments calling for a total ban on handguns and will campaign for a free vote on what they insist must be an issue of conscience. The Liberal Democrats will support them, and with four Tory MPs, David Melor, Hugh Dykes, Terry Dicks, and Robert Hughes, having indicated their support for an outright ban, it may be left up to the nine Ulster Unionist MPs to cast the deciding votes.

The Rev Martin Smyth, the chief whip of the Ulster Unionists, refused yesterday to be drawn on whether they would back the Government. While he said they were not convinced of the case for a total ban on handguns, he expressed concern that terrorists could start targeting gun clubs if weapons were stored on the premises.

The Government's Bill will result in the destruction of around 160,000 of the 200,000 odd handguns currently in circulation in England, Wales and Scotland.

There would also be tighter licensing procedures, stronger police powers to suspend or revoke certificates, a ban on dum-dum ammunition, tighter mail order controls, and a requirement for all handgun users to have certificates, and notify police when they dispose of their weapons. Some professions, such as vets, will be allowed to keep more powerful guns.

Parents and relatives of the 16 children and teacher who were killed in Dunblane will be fighting for an all-out ban, while the shooting lobby is equally determined to oppose it.

GUNS

Tony Blair, responding to the Queen's Speech, said Labour welcomed what had been announced already on gun control.

But he added: "If we are banning 160,000 handguns, presently lawfully held, what is the case for leaving the remaining 40,000 at large?"

Mr Blair said that if .22 handguns could cause similar damage to that which was inflicted at Dunblane, then it followed that all handguns should be banned.

"Let the 80% solution become the 100% solution and Parliament will have done the will of the people."

John Major acknowledged differences in the Commons on the Government's proposals to reform the gun laws, but said there was an "overwhelming belief" that new legislation should be enacted as speedily as possible.

Michael Forsyth, Secretary of State for Scotland, added: "By any standards those people who wish to see handguns off our streets will wish to see this legislation on the statute book as quickly as possible."

The way for that to happen is for Parliament to give it as free a ride as possible, and that depends on the Opposition. We will do our bit and whip it through the House."



The Queen and the Prince of Wales making their way into the Palace of Westminster yesterday

Photograph: PA

Mandatory sentences top Howard's agenda

Patricia Wynn Davies and Jason Benetto

CRIME AND POLICE

Michael Howard has savagely shamed parole and automatic early release, and bringing in automatic indeterminate life sentences for second-time rapists or violent offenders and mandatory minimum sentences for three-convicted domestic burglars and serious drug dealers.

The Home Secretary wants the Crime (Sentences) Bill, to be published tomorrow, to have cleared all its Commons and Lords' stages by Friday so it can receive Royal Assent by Easter. Key measures in the separate Police Bill are the creation of a new national crime squad and an agency to vet the criminal records of job applicants.

The Crime Bill will concentrate on the core issues of abol-

ishing parole and automatic early release, and bringing in automatic indeterminate life sentences for second-time rapists or violent offenders and mandatory minimum sentences for three-convicted domestic burglars and serious drug dealers.

The sentencing crackdown has provoked bitter opposition from the judiciary and a full-scale cross-party rebellion is in prospect when the measure reaches the Lords. Paul Cavendish, chairman of the Penal Affairs Consortium said: "Mandatory sentences will do nothing to reduce crime but a great deal to produce serious injustice. Automatic sentences for serious violent and sexual offenders will lead to fewer guilty pleas, greater distress to victims who have to give evidence, more plea-bargaining and more wrongful acquittals of dangerous offenders.

A series of further possibilities that Mr Howard had publicly paraded - including banning of 18s from drinking in public places, "naming

and shaming" juveniles in magistrates' courts, and a new sentence of deprivation of a driving licence - were all absent from yesterday's speech.

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The crunch issue, however, is the attitude of Labour in the Commons. The Government hopes to trap the party into a position of appearing "soft" on serious crime. A key issue will be how closely the Bill will seek to define the "exceptional circumstances" when the mandatory sentences would not apply.

North of the border, the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill will omit the mandatory minimum sentence for

This will reduce rather than increase public safety."

Penal campaigners have warned that the measures would see the record prison population of more than 57,000 soaring by at least another 10,000, at a cost of hundreds of millions of pounds.

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North of the border, the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill will omit the mandatory minimum sentence for

domestic burglars, though a seven-year minimum is proposed for traffickers in Class A drugs. The omission, Michael Forsyth, the Scottish Secretary said, was due to a downward trend in burglaries. In addition, some repeat burglars can be sent for trial at the Scottish High Court, where they are already at risk of a life sentence.

The National Crime Squad proposed in the Police Bill will have two wings. An operational one will be made up of the existing six regional crime squads who will support police forces in the investigation of serious crime. The intelligence-gathering role will be carried out by the National Criminal Intelligence Service.

New legislation will also al-

low police officers legally to break into homes, search them, copy documents, and plant listening devices and cameras.

The Bill also proposes the creation of a Criminal Records Agency for England and Wales. The agency would be able to charge private companies and individuals for checks on potential employees.

There would be three types of checks: a criminal conviction certificate which would contain information of current convictions; a "full" check for jobs such as teaching, lawyers, health care, which would include details of cautions and spent convictions; and "enhanced" checks for those seeking work with children or in the gaming, betting and lottery business.

Laws for tougher controls on foreign-registered ships follow the wreck of the *Ernest*, which caused one of the nation's biggest oil spills. The merchant shipping and maritime safety bill would allow the Government to charge shipowners for emergency pollution control work if a vessel began to spill its load, and also to charge for safety inspections of their vessels in British ports.

The Merchant Shipping and Maritime Safety Bill, to be introduced by Virginia Bottomley, the National Heritage Secretary could be controversial because it will allow grants for state homes where the owners allow access to the public.

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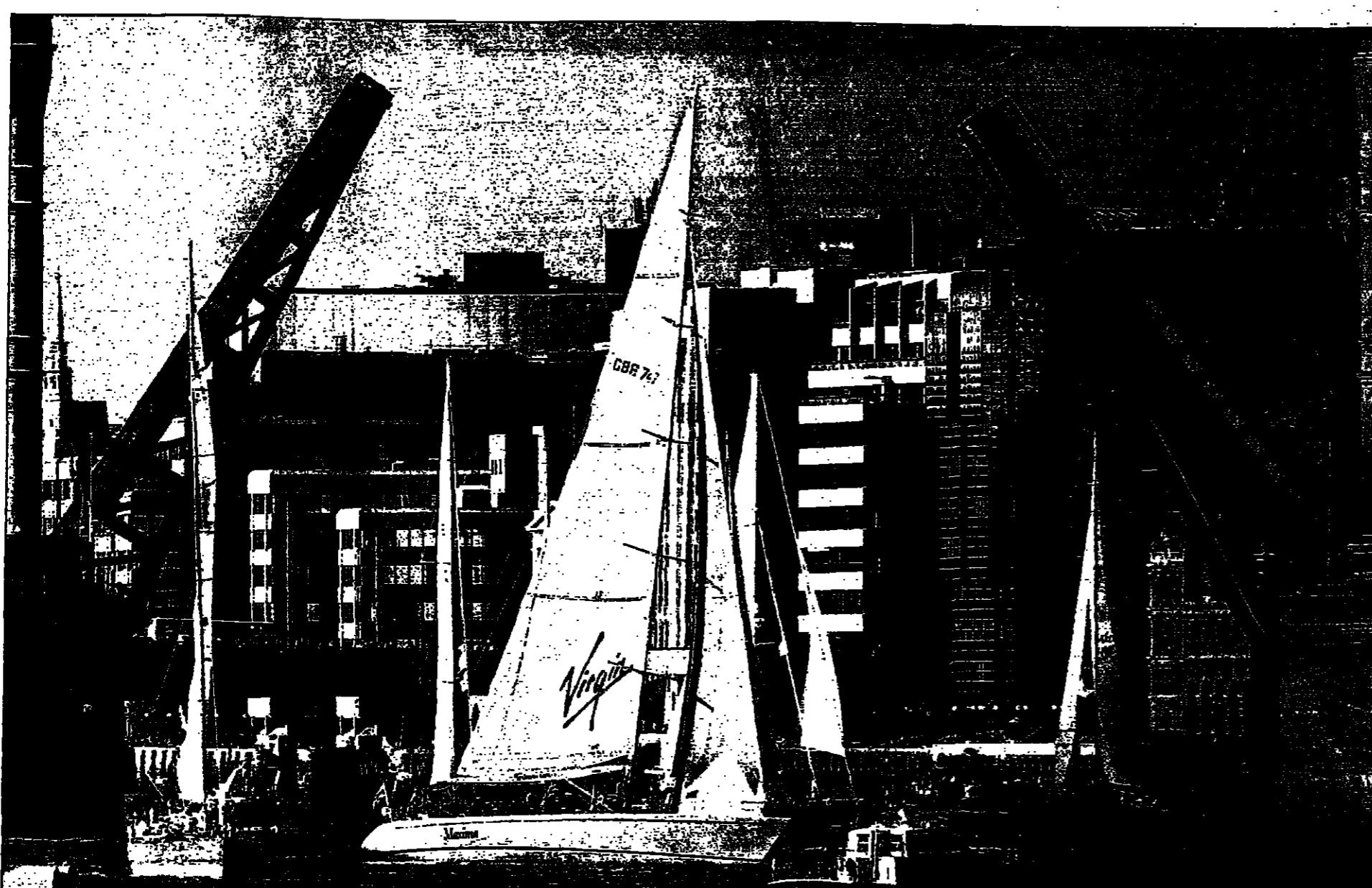
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Ship shape: Yachts setting sail from St Katharine's Dock in central London yesterday to launch the Hong Kong Challenge round-the-world yachting regatta. They will sail from Southampton to Porto in Portugal on Saturday on the first leg of the event, which is backed by the United Nations as part of its Sports Against Drugs campaign

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Lighting up can enhance memory

Glenda Cooper

stimulates the release of other chemicals enabling nerve cells to communicate.

The group worked with rat brains to simulate the process of smoking a cigarette - during which nicotine reaches the brain 10 seconds after taking a puff. They found that when nicotine was detected in arterial blood during smoking, there were also raised levels of a molecule called glutamate, which stimulates nerve-cell activity.

The findings have relevance to Alzheimer's disease, in which a loss of acetylcholine may help explain the poor memory of sufferers. It has long been recognised that forms of dementia are less common in smokers and by developing drugs which have a similar effect to nicotine, it may be possible to exploit these useful effects without the risks of smoking.

As a highly addictive drug, nicotine is normally seen negatively as the substance that gets people hooked on tobacco. But it has been known for a long time that nicotine can improve memory and learning, and the drug has also been linked to arousal, attention and rapid information processing. The drug also affects both working and long-term memory in ways that can cause cravings years after the person has given up smoking.

In *Nature*, a group of US scientists offers an explanation for these effects. Research done at Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, Texas suggests that nicotine increases the transmission of nerve impulses in the part of the brain involved in learning and memory. It appears to do this by mimicking the effect of a neurotransmitter called acetylcholine, which

DAILY POEM

archy and mehitabel: the crippled cockroach

By Don Marquis

well boss i
think i will start a
cave of my own i have a
lot of playmates who
are familiar with the res-
taurant business in its most
occult phases and i
could depend upon them for
attendance if not for col-
lections i shall call it the
crippled cockroach and the
motto shall be drop in boys the
onion soup is fine the
management will keep an eye
on the hats and coats but
refuses to be responsible
for the food served this
restaurant of mine will
be different yours till
they find a diet
cure for the tropic
of cancer

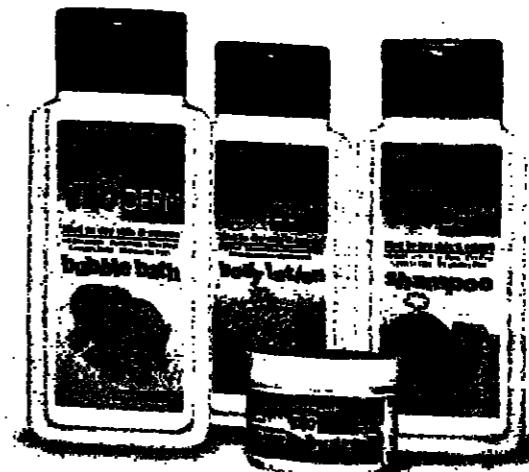
archy

Don Marquis died more than half a century ago, writes Jeff Adams (editor of his posthumous *archyology: the long lost tales of archy and mehitabel*, Bloodaxe, £7.95). At that time, many of his manuscripts and scrapbooks were simply gathered together, locked in a steamer trunk, and stored in a Brooklyn warehouse. Among those papers were literally hundreds of archy and mehitabel stories. I examined the archive and made this lucky discovery: a great number of these "lost" tales of archy and mehitabel had never before been published in a collection. They will make you smile, but be warned - they will also make you think.

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Banned for a debt of £32,000. But he didn't owe a penny

Glenda Cooper

Jaz Stichaw could not believe his eyes. He had been turned down for a Barclaycard because he was £32,000 in the red.

But Mr Stichaw had never once been in debt. A 32-year-old lawyer he had always been careful with his finances. Barclaycard had been informed that this was his financial status by the credit-reference agency Equifax and had turned down his application accordingly.

As a lawyer, Mr Stichaw knew what action to take, deciding to sue Equifax, eventually settling out of court. But for other people the way forward may not be so clear.

Credit-reference agencies have claimed that the mistakes they make account for less than 1 per cent. But the Data Protection Registrar is now considering investigating the accuracy of credit-reference agencies after a survey which suggested that errors on people's files may be far more common than previously thought.

Each week, nearly 400,000 people apply for credit – whether it is setting up a bank account, applying for a storecard or getting an interest-free loan on a car. Credit-reference files provide a snapshot of how a person manages their fi-

nances. Negative information about defaults of county court judgments for non-payment of debts stays on your record for six years and can lead to people being turned down.

There are three credit-reference agencies in Britain – Equifax, CCR and CDMS. Between them they hold 135 million files containing electoral roll information, public record information and information supplied by lenders.

A survey for tonight's edition of the Channel 4 programme, *Debt*, found that a third of people had some sort of mistake on their files. Some were minor ones which could lead to confusion but others were serious which could lead to people being wrongly refused credit.

Of the 30 people who sent off for their files, 13 people found errors. These included mistakenly attributed court judgments, factual errors concerning mortgages and wrong residents at the wrong address.

More serious situations can result as Mr Stichaw found some time ago when his application for Barclaycard was turned down. "I was completely horrified because I'm careful about finances and I certainly had no debts.

"As a lawyer I recognised that this was slanderous. And because of that I issued a high court writ." The case was eventually settled out of court.

David Smith of the Data Protection Office said: "It's a slur on their character, they complain – these people know

that I had over £32,000 worth of debt and I was completely horrified because I'm careful about finances and I certainly had no debts.

He said that the ombudsman was considering a feasibility study to look into the amount of errors creeping into files. "At present, we only see people who complain – these people know

they have a problem," he said. "But others may not know if there are problems. If you apply for credit and get it you may be quite happy but it doesn't mean the information on your file is necessarily right and it could affect you in future applications...

"There's a lot more credit reference agencies could do to ensure the information is right. Kevin Still, group marketing

director for Equifax said: "The majority of errors occur in the information supplied to us, such as county court judgments or information supplied by the lenders themselves.

"We get 1,300 requests a day of which 20 per cent result in queries. Of those, several require detailed investigation and it is in the order of one per cent that need some change because there is a material error."

In the United States, United

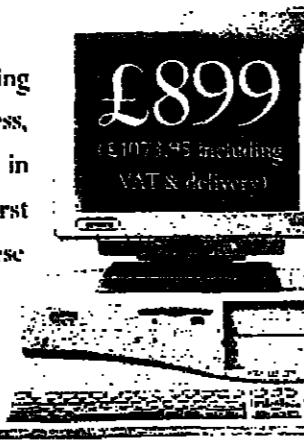
Would you credit it? Jaz Stichaw, who was refused a Barclaycard because of false information. Photograph: Joan Russell

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BA to the fore as ticketless air travel takes off

James Cusick

British Airways is on course to abolish paper tickets on its domestic flights by next spring, in line with moves by international airlines worldwide. BA believes the era of "ticketless" air travel is about to take off.

On BA's Gatwick-to-Aberdeen route, ticketless trials have been in progress since August. Passengers with hand baggage only simply reserve their seat by telephone using their credit card. At the airport they check in at a special desk by swiping their card, and choose their seat by touch-screen technology. The only paper they handle is their boarding card.

Passengers with luggage go through the same procedure, but check in their bags normally and also receive a boarding card. BA said yesterday that the system had so far proved swifter and simpler than the old-fashioned ticket system. If an extension of the trial to some travel agents proves successful, they "hope to have a ticketless domestic service by next spring".

British Airways currently deals with 5.8 million passengers annually on its United Kingdom internal routes. With the International Air Transport Authority (IATA) claiming that processing paper tickets costs around 25 p per ticket against only £1 for an electronic ticket, the potential savings – which could be passed on to passengers – are substantial.

Ditching paper and replacing it with electronic technology is now being tested by the world's leading airlines. Passport and immigration checks at airports are also likely to be speeded up by electronic checks as airlines and airport authorities introduce "smart-card" technology.

According to the IATA, a paper ticket will soon be a thing of the past, with "intelligent" ticketing likely to be the norm by 2005. IATA is currently looking at how it can introduce and enforce international standards for the latter.

In the United States, United

Airlines has so far introduced electronic ticketing on 40 per cent of its domestic services, using similar procedures to BA.

IBM, the computer giant whose early business included manufacturing machines that processed immigrants at US ports, has gone back to its roots with newly developed "smart-card" technology that is being tested at Bermuda's international airport. The "fastgate" immigration card is designed to put an end to long passport queues for arrivals from international flights.

Essentially involving an electronic passport, passengers apply to encode their passport details and the unique pattern of their own handprint, on a form of frequent flyer card, similar to a credit card.

At the airport, passengers simply swipe the card through the digital passport desk, place their hand on an identification screen, and are informed whether they pass or not. IBM is confident that the system can be worldwide use within five years. Bermuda airport, which handles half a million passengers each year, will test the new technology next year.

If successful, the Bermuda test will need to be expanded, with the "fastgate" process being tested out at one of the larger international airports. It is understood that IBM has already held initial discussions with the airport authorities at London Heathrow and at Frankfurt airport in Germany.

The Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland has upheld complaints by the International Federation of Airline Pilots' Associations and the Irish Airline Pilots' Association against an airline for making a joke out of last August's Sudan Airways' hijacking at Stansted airport in Essex. A Ryanair advertisement showed a photograph of the hijacked jet and said: "It's amazing what lengths people will go to fly cheaper than Ryanair". Ryanair has apologised and said the "light-hearted" advertisement would not be repeated.

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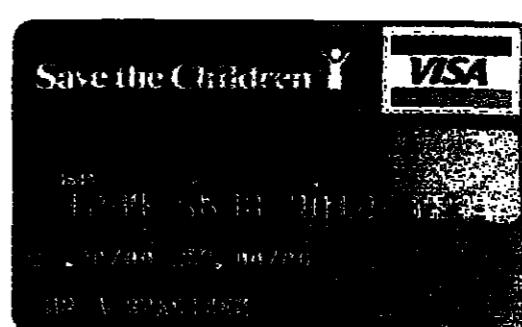
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Jaz Stichaw

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THE NEW PRIMERA

On West Bank they bestow hero status on French President, but the reaction at home is cooler

Chirac demands a state for Palestine

Patrick Cockburn
Jerusalem

Advocating a Palestinian state as the best way to achieve peace in the Middle East, French President Jacques Chirac yesterday became the first foreign leader to address the Palestinian legislature. The French leader's visit to Israel and the autonomous Palestinian enclaves has become politically highly charged since his verbal confrontation with Israeli security men in the Old City of Jerusalem on Tuesday was shown on television screens across the Middle East.

Greeted by crowds shouting "Vive La France" in Ramallah, the autonomous Palestinian enclave 18 miles north of Jerusalem, Mr Chirac told the 88 member Palestinian Legislative Council: "A Palestinian state is not in any way a danger to the security of anyone. On the contrary, a Palestinian state and comprehensive and just peace guarantees security for all." Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, and his government are wholly opposed to Palestinian statehood.

The French President called for a greater French and European role in the Middle East peace talks in which the United States has monopolised the role of mediator.

He said: "I salute the US role, but I see the peace process losing its breath because of the loss of trust. I see the European and French role in building more trust."

Mr Chirac criticised changes being made on the ground in Jerusalem, such as Israel's confiscation of land and the demolition of houses, as well as the economic closure imposed on the West Bank and Gaza.

All this will have delighted Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian leader, though his strategy re-

mains primarily to get as much American support as possible during the negotiations on the Israeli withdrawal from Hebron.

The Israeli daily *Haaretz* said yesterday that both the Israeli and Palestinian leaders, convinced that President Bill Clinton will win re-election, want to impress him with their flexibility, but also "to appear to their public as diligent warriors battling over the last detail."

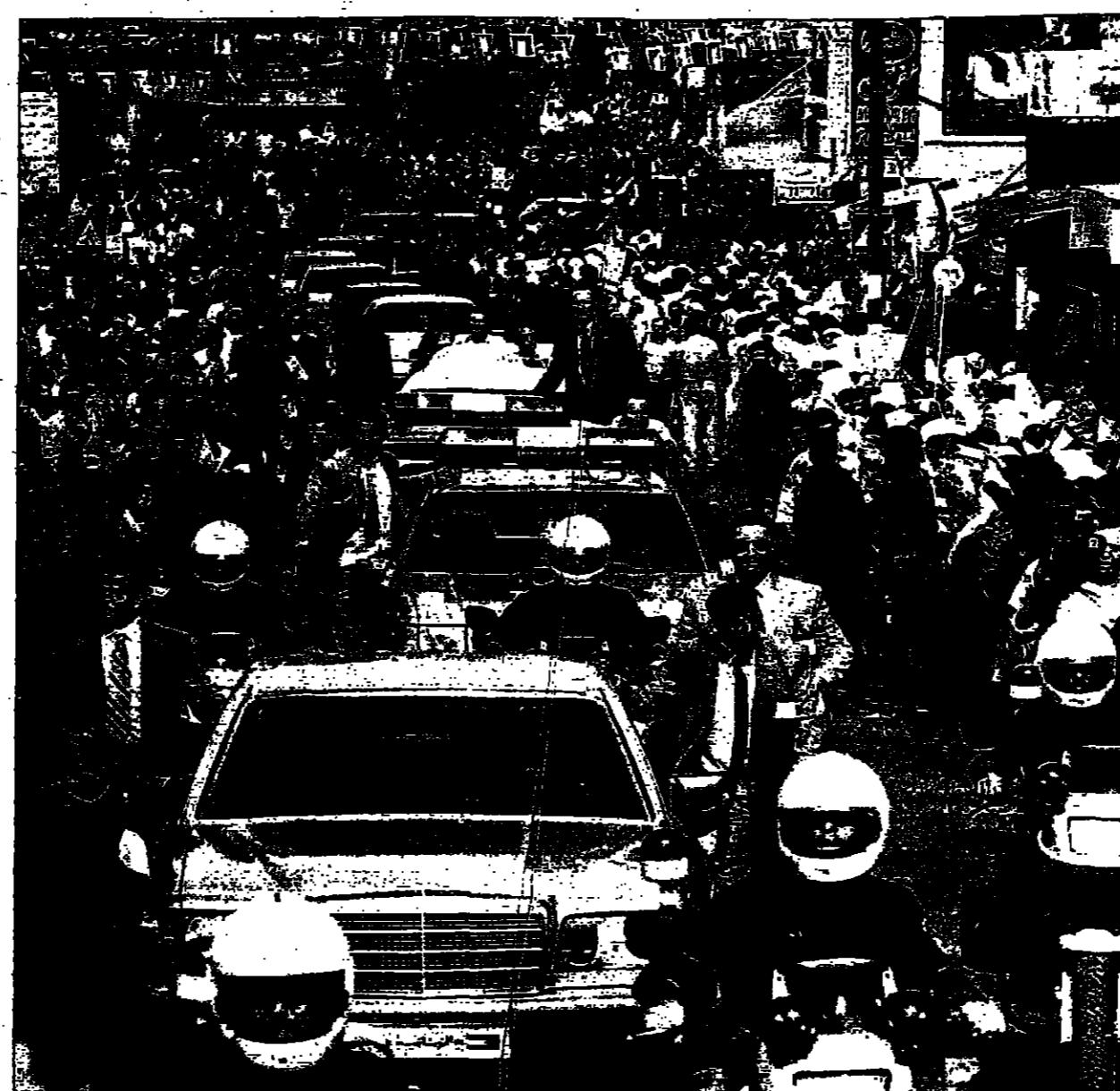
In the rest of the Middle East Mr Chirac's brief fracas in Jerusalem has won him widespread praise. The Syrian daily *Tishreen* said: "Because Chirac came to the region to urge Israel's rulers to adhere to the land-for-peace principle as the basis of the peace process, he was met with deliberate provocation by the Israeli leaders."

In Tehran, Ali Akbar Velayati, the Foreign Minister, said: "The presence of Paris in the region indicates that the European Union has come to its senses and wants to play a role independently of the US."

France has sought to limit US predominance in the Middle East twice already this year: by questioning the continuation of sanctions against Iraq; and by carrying out an independent diplomatic role during Israel's bombardment of Lebanon, the so-called Grapes of Wrath operation, in April.

In neither case were French initiatives productive. In the two main conflicts in the Middle East, the Arab-Israeli dispute and the cold war against Saddam Hussein and Iraq, the US remains the only foreign power with real influence.

As Mr Chirac flew to Gaza the US and Israeli officials said that an agreement is imminent over the redeployment of the Israeli army in Hebron, the Palestinian city of 100,000 in which



Driving force: Jacques Chirac and Yasser Arafat leading a motorcade through Ramallah yesterday. Photograph: Reuters

live some 400 Jewish settlers. Martin Indyk, the American ambassador, said yesterday: "We are relatively close to the end of these negotiations." Israel said that delay on an agreement is because Mr Arafat is stalling for time – possibly until after the US presidential election.

The changes in the Hebron agreement made at the insistence of Mr Netanyahu appear largely cosmetic. The main Palestinian concessions were made last year when Mr Arafat agreed, in effect, to partition the city with 20 per cent of it remaining under Israeli control to protect the settlers.

The main Israeli settlement at Kiryat Arba, with a population of 7,000, was never affected by the interim agreement and the cold war against Saddam Hussein and Iraq. The US remains the only foreign power with real influence.

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home crowd that might once have accompanied a French leader on foreign trips now seems muted, despite the high foreign policy profile Mr Chirac has adopted since his election.

Even those taking note of Mr Chirac's performance seemed uncertain which of two opposing instincts to follow: one was to shout "hurrah" for a straight-talking, France-promoting leader unafraid to take on Israel, then security services and, indirectly, the Americans – even if his strongest words were uttered in the enemy's tongue, English.

The other instinct, however, was to worry that Mr Chirac's unbridled outspokenness might be more of a liability than an asset. No media commentators were indignant enough to enumerate examples of Chiracian diplomacy, but if they had, they might have included some of the tongue, English.

His lambasting of The Netherlands' prime minister for running a "drugs state" at his first EU dinner at the Elysée last year; the timing of the nuclear test announcement to coincide with the sinking of the *Rainbow Warrior*; his accusation of "spinelessness" against other Western powers over Bosnia; his failure to warn the Germans that he was ending military service in France, and his ridiculing of Italy's determination to be among the first to join a single European currency.

In each case diplomats were left to sort out the mess. At the Quai d'Orsay, there is said to be deep gloom.

Before Mr Chirac set off for the Middle East, one foreign ministry official was quoted as saying that "he was poorly prepared" and that starting the tour in Damascus was calculated to "inflame the Israelis and weaken the resolve of moderate Arabs".

"You can't," he reportedly said, "present yourself as *As-Sa'ad*'s best friend and then aspire to play the role of mediator."

If only Mr Chirac could have foreseen what would happen in Israel.

Others contented themselves with "Chirac's fit of rage" and the satirical weekly, *Le Canard Enchaîné* (which, by happy chance, appears on Wednesdays) offered: "Nervous diplomacy, the mediator gets angry" and a crop of cartoons. One, depicting Mr Chirac and Mr Netanyahu side by side, had a bystander saying: "They'll need a mediator just to get them to shake hands".

French media avoid president's 'intifada'

Mary Dejevsky
Paris

Jacques Chirac was all over the front pages of France's national newspapers yesterday, having headed news bulletins throughout the previous evening with what were described as "the major diplomatic incidents in Jerusalem". "Chirac wages his intifada," said the front-page headline on the left-of-centre *Liberation*, above a picture of the French president pushing Israeli security guards away.

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Aside from enjoying the drama, however, the French media seemed reluctant to take a stand one way or the other on Mr Chirac's *démarche*. To be sure, there had been diplomatic incidents, but both sides had decided the argument should be closed, and most commentators respectfully followed suit.

The "line", in so far as there was one, was expressed by prominent commentator, Alain Duhamel, speaking on the radio station, Europe 1. "The explanation for the incident in Jerusalem is much less Chirac's style – warmth, spontaneity, straight-talking and seeking contact with the people – than a basic difference of opinion. The Israelis regard Jerusalem as their capital and their sovereignty over it as indivisible.

Europeans in general, and France in particular, do not accept the annexation of the Arab part of Jerusalem and don't recognise the three-Holy City as the capital of Israel. The incident in Jerusalem will from now on signify this difference."

The only hints of criticism came, predictably, but gently, from the left of centre. In *Liberation*, the paper's foreign



Jacques Chirac: His unbridled outspokenness worries some

affairs commentator, Jacques Amalric, asked whether, even if one believed that a Palestinian state was desirable in the long term, it was "judicious" to propose one's own services as "mediator" – or, in Elysée parlance, "facilitator of peace".

A similar tone was adopted by the leader of the Socialist Party, Lionel Jospin, who appealed to question the wisdom of Mr Chirac's outburst, noting that "diplomacy is a difficult art". Mr Jospin spent his early career in the foreign ministry.

The wider public seemed almost uninterested, preoccupied with matters closer to home, such as jobs, pay and strikes. The cheering from the

French media, however, was expressed by prominent commentator, Alain Duhamel, speaking on the radio station, Europe 1. "The explanation for the incident in Jerusalem is much less Chirac's style – warmth, spontaneity, straight-talking and seeking contact with the people – than a basic difference of opinion. The Israelis regard Jerusalem as their capital and their sovereignty over it as indivisible.

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Even those taking note of Mr Chirac's performance seemed uncertain which of two opposing instincts to follow: one was to shout "hurrah" for a straight-talking, France-promoting leader unafraid to take on Israel, then security services and, indirectly, the Americans – even if his strongest words were uttered in the enemy's tongue, English.

The other instinct, however, was to worry that Mr Chirac's unbridled outspokenness might be more of a liability than an asset. No media commentators were indignant enough to enumerate examples of Chiracian diplomacy, but if they had, they might have included some of the tongue, English.

His lambasting of The Netherlands' prime minister for running a "drugs state" at his first EU dinner at the Elysée last year; the timing of the nuclear test announcement to coincide with the sinking of the *Rainbow Warrior*; his accusation of "spinelessness" against other Western powers over Bosnia; his failure to warn the Germans that he was ending military service in France, and his ridiculing of Italy's determination to be among the first to join a single European currency.

In each case diplomats were left to sort out the mess. At the Quai d'Orsay, there is said to be deep gloom.

Before Mr Chirac set off for the Middle East, one foreign ministry official was quoted as saying that "he was poorly prepared" and that starting the tour in Damascus was calculated to "inflame the Israelis and weaken the resolve of moderate Arabs".

"You can't," he reportedly said, "present yourself as *As-Sa'ad*'s best friend and then aspire to play the role of mediator."

If only Mr Chirac could have foreseen what would happen in Israel.

The only hints of criticism came, predictably, but gently, from the left of centre. In *Liberation*, the paper's foreign

international

EU to press for Mid-East role

Katherine Butler
Strasbourg and John Lichfield

competition between the EU and the US in a bid to shape the direction of the talks but he insisted Europe's economic weight in the region could not be ignored. "The EU is the major trading partner for every country in the region and indeed is the biggest donor to the Palestinian authority", he said. Europe's biggest political leverage lies in the fact that it accounts for half of Israel's foreign trade and 85% of aid to the Palestinian people.

The appointment was proposed by EU heads of government earlier this month but so far has not materialised due to divisions over the mandate the envoy should be given. Irish Foreign Minister Dick Spring said in Strasbourg yesterday said was a clear desire for a more "hands on" role for the EU in the peace process, although he conceded that definitive agreement on neither the scope of the mandate nor the identity of the future envoy could be guaranteed by Monday's meeting.

Jacques Delors is among those who have been suggested as a potential candidate for the post, but there is strong resistance among some member states to any appointee who might be seen as bringing along too much "political baggage".

The fear being voiced in other capitals, however, is that the appointee will have to be a senior political personality rather than a career diplomat if the EU's emissary is to have any hope of exerting influence. Mr Spring denied there was

One of the best ways of advancing peace would be to guarantee the economic regeneration of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Mr Spring said.

"I have to say I don't see any other way of that happening without the active involvement – in cash terms or otherwise – of the European Union", he added.

Mr Spring, who visited the Middle East on the EU's behalf three weeks ago, played down the prospect of Israeli objections to the appointment of an envoy.

He was also careful to stress that the desire is not for an EU seat at the negotiating table, with Irish officials adding that the emphasis would be on appointing a close observer of both the talks and the channelling of economic aid.

The Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, who is to visit Israel at the end of next week, said yesterday that the appointment of an EU envoy should not be ruled out, but warned against appointment "for its own sake".

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14
international

Pakistan orders Taliban to end Kabul crackdown

Caroline Lees

Kabul
The self-styled Islamic fundamentalist government set up last month in Kabul by the Taliban militia has been told it has become an international laughing-stock by a Pakistani diplomat sent to advise the regime.

Pictures of Taliban soldiers unravelling videotapes and smashing televisions on the streets of the Afghan capital have played into the Western media's hands and made the regime look ridiculous, the diplomat said.

At a meeting last week with Taliban leaders, the envoy insisted that the movement should soften the hardline Islamic regime it imposed on the city if it wants to win international support. According to one source, the Taliban have been ordered to "drop the mullah act and behave in a more international manner".

Since it took over the city, the Taliban have issued a series of decrees which angered people in Kabul and outraged world opinion.

Women have been banned from working and girls from going to school and university. Men have been ordered to grow beards and wear turbans. Western clothes have been outlawed - even traffic police have

been told to stop wearing ties, as they are considered "too English".

Details of last week's secret meeting appear to confirm the close working relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban. Despite denials, Pakistan has supported the Taliban movement since it started, providing weapons and financial backing. It is preparing to reopen its embassy in Kabul - diplomats have spent the past week searching for offices in the city.

On Kabul streets there are signs the Taliban have listened to the advice of their Pakistani advisers. Women, earlier ordered to cover themselves from head to foot in public and told they would be beaten if they left their homes without a male relative, can be seen in the bazaar unaccompanied.

Schoolgirls have been told they will be given automatic passes to this year's examinations without having to sit them. Female Western journalists, banned from Taliban press conferences at first, have been given access to leaders.

An official said the recent softening of the Taliban had been noticeable, but admitted that the new administration faced a dilemma.

"Some Taliban leaders know they have to win international approval but they cannot try too

hard or its fighters will think they are selling out to the West and abandoning the Islamic principles they have fought so hard for. The UN has said it will not recognise the new government because it will not allow women to work and girls to go to school. The Taliban know that if they give in and allow girls back to school their fighters will desert them."

Yesterday Amir Motaqi, who is styled minister for culture and information, tried to please both sides. "We are not against the education of women and girls. We have stopped them from working and going to school because the circumstances are not yet suitable for them to do so. It is not yet possible to give Islamic education to women and children."

He acknowledged that the Taliban needed to win international recognition but said it would never compromise its Islamic principles.

■ Talk of a truce between the Taliban and former government forces seems to have been abandoned after both sides admitted they could not agree on conditions. Abdul Rashid Dostum, the northern warlord, appeared to join forces with Ahmed Shah Massoud, the former government's military commander, in a big offensive against the Taliban.



Suffer the children: A girl peers through a makeshift curtain in a Kabul hospital, all of which have been told by the Taliban to segregate males and females. Photograph: AFP

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Zaire drifts towards ethnic war

David Orr
Nairobi

Increasingly incensed at the Zairean army's attacks on ethnic Tutsis, whose presence in eastern Zaire goes back 200 years.

The Rwandan government is also frustrated by the continuing presence of its nationals in the region's refugee camps. Rwandan Hutu extremists, committed to returning home by force, have been launching frequent raids into Rwanda from their bases in the camps.

According to some sources, Zaire has been arming and training the Rwandan Hutu rebels and arms supplies are believed to have been allowed to land at Goma airport by the Zairean authorities.

While there is no evidence of Burundian troops attacking Zaire, there have been reports of Tutsi militias launching cross-border raids from Burundi.

Burundi's Tutsi-dominated government, which has been isolated by international sanctions since a military coup in July, has resolutely refused to negotiate with Hutu rebels seeking to overthrow it. The Burundian rebels, like their Rwandan counterparts, are operating from eastern Zaire.

With the Great Lakes region increasingly polarised along Hutu-Tutsi lines, the three coun-



Fury over 'mongrel' remark

Sydney — Port Lincoln, one of Australia's most remote towns, has sprung to national attention over a row surrounding its mayor, Peter Davis, who yesterday refused to retract his description of the children of mixed-race couples as "mongrels", writes Robert Milliken.

Mr Davis's outburst is the latest in the debate over non-white immigration, Aboriginal affairs and multiculturalism, which has swept Australia since the election last March of the conservative Liberal-National coalition government led by John Howard.

Outraged ethnic groups called for the sacking of Mr Davis, who said: "If you are a child of a mixed race, particularly Asian-Caucasian or Aboriginal-white, you are a mongrel. That's what happens when you cross dogs or whatever. I'm not a racist... but I do recognise that cultures are different."

Nine of the town's 10 councillors resigned after he refused to withdraw his remarks.

Zairean army has sent a message to its divided government that its top priority should be the protection of national unity. Zaire's state radio issued pleas to the populace to contribute money to help the country's impoverished army. The war in the east concerns all Zaireans.

In recent days, the Zairean army has brought reinforcements of troops and artillery to Bukavu, the provincial capital of South Kivu.

However, if it came to all-out conflict between Zaire and Rwanda, few observers believe Zaire could withstand an all-out attack by the well-disciplined and motivated Rwandan army.

Zaire's armed forces are ragged, unpaid and poorly trained.

A Zairean government spokesman said yesterday that "elements of the Rwandan army" attacked parts of North Kivu, but were repelled by Zairean forces.

Rwanda's Tutsi-led regime has denied entering Zaire. Yet its leaders are known to be in

tries' individual conflicts risk exploding in an ethnic fireball. In such a conflagration, borders and diplomacy would seem meaningless.

The large movement of refugees and civilians of recent days could be the precursor of a humanitarian emergency on a massive scale.

With all journalists ordered out of eastern Zaire and aid workers unable to travel safely, the true extent of the suffering there has yet to emerge.

"We are definitely facing a looming catastrophe if food supplies cannot arrive in Bukavu," a United Nations World Food Programme spokesman said. "We need food there immediately."



Modern society is plagued with record numbers of wild, untameable children. But modern society is fighting back, with a controversial psychoactive drug. Hester Lacey investigates the Ritalin generation

Prize fight... it's Turner Prize time again, and the four contenders on the shortlist are as quirky and colourful as ever. Andy Beckett talks exclusively to Simon Patterson, Douglas Gordon, Craigie Horsfield and Gary Hume (creator of the 'Snowman', right)

Merrell Williams was a humble legal clerk. Then he stole some documents that might wreck the tobacco industry. Now he's scared. Peter Pringle meets the ultimate whistle-blower

Plus: Nicholas Barber on the joy of Friends

IN THIS WEEKEND'S
INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY

On United Nations Day, David Usborne reports that a radical overhaul is being considered

UN fights over plans to slash back bureaucracy

Efforts to kick-start a radical overhaul of the sprawling web of bureaucracies that make up the United Nations have triggered a firestorm of controversy within the organisation as agency heads scramble to defend their fiefs.

One dramatic proposal, informally circulated by the head of the United Nations Development Programme, Gustave Speth, has caused widespread fury in UN corridors in New York headquarters and in field offices around the world. Stunned in its reach, it would entail recasting the upper reaches of the UN Secretariat and exponentially expanding the role of the UNDP itself.

"All hell has broken loose," one senior UN source in New York noted yesterday. "And Speth is probably on his way out as a result of it."

The drama was sparked initially by the Secretary General, Boutros Ghali, who earlier this year sought advice from a wide array of sources on how to set about untangling the widely criticised mess of often overlapping UN agencies, departments, committees and commissions. All told, these employ almost 60,000 UN-employed bureaucrats around the globe.

Mr Boutros-Ghali is expected to offer some initial conclusions on tackling reform in the next few weeks, sources said. He will do so against the background of the pledge made by the United States to veto his reappointment to a second term as Secretary-General at the end of the year on the grounds that he has been insufficiently committed to institutional reform.

The Speth plan, excerpt of which have been leaked, is most notable for calling for a grouping of all the UN's development and humanitarian activities under a single body. That body would essentially be a vastly enhanced UNDP, but would bear a new and more populist name, the UN Alliance for People.

At the Alliance's pinnacle would be one of five newly created senior UN administrators with the title of Deputy Secretary General or Director General. Mr Speth envisages five such Deputies in a newly forged UN Secretariat, each leading a single department. Thus the 10 main departments now contained in the Secretariat would be cut by half. One of the five deputies would act as Secretary General whenever the Secretary General proper is away.

Under the Alliance umbrella would not only the functions of the UNDP, but also those of the UN Children's Fund (Unicef), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (Wfp) and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. None of these agencies are thrilled by

manding mould-breaking reform. Washington has circulated a plan of its own that is somewhat milder. It suggests, for instance, the creation of a single Deputy Secretary General who would be in charge of day-to-day running of the UN.

Both have meanwhile voiced cautious support for the Speth document. "The Speth ideas are among several proposals that are being launched," the British Ambassador to the UN, Sir John Weston, said yesterday. "He knows that we welcome the effort and imagination he

has put into that even if that doesn't mean that we will necessarily support all of what he has to say."

Both the US document and another plan to be submitted next week by the European Union focus not just on changes in the Secretariat, but also on significantly revamping the UN's Economic and Social Committee (Ecosoc), the main policy-setting body for all the UN's economic, development and humanitarian activities. Ecosoc, which is served by a swathe of agencies and commissions, is widely regarded to be drowning in verbiage, duplication and waste.

Common threads in the reports include steps to eliminate some departments and agencies no longer deemed useful. Candidates for termination range from the Vienna-based UN Industrial Development Organisation (Unido) to such zany entities as the Committee on Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. There is also agreement on the need to strengthen the governing body of Ecosoc itself. In countries benefitting from UN programmes, all UN agencies would be located in one premise and a single UN representative would be appointed to take charge.

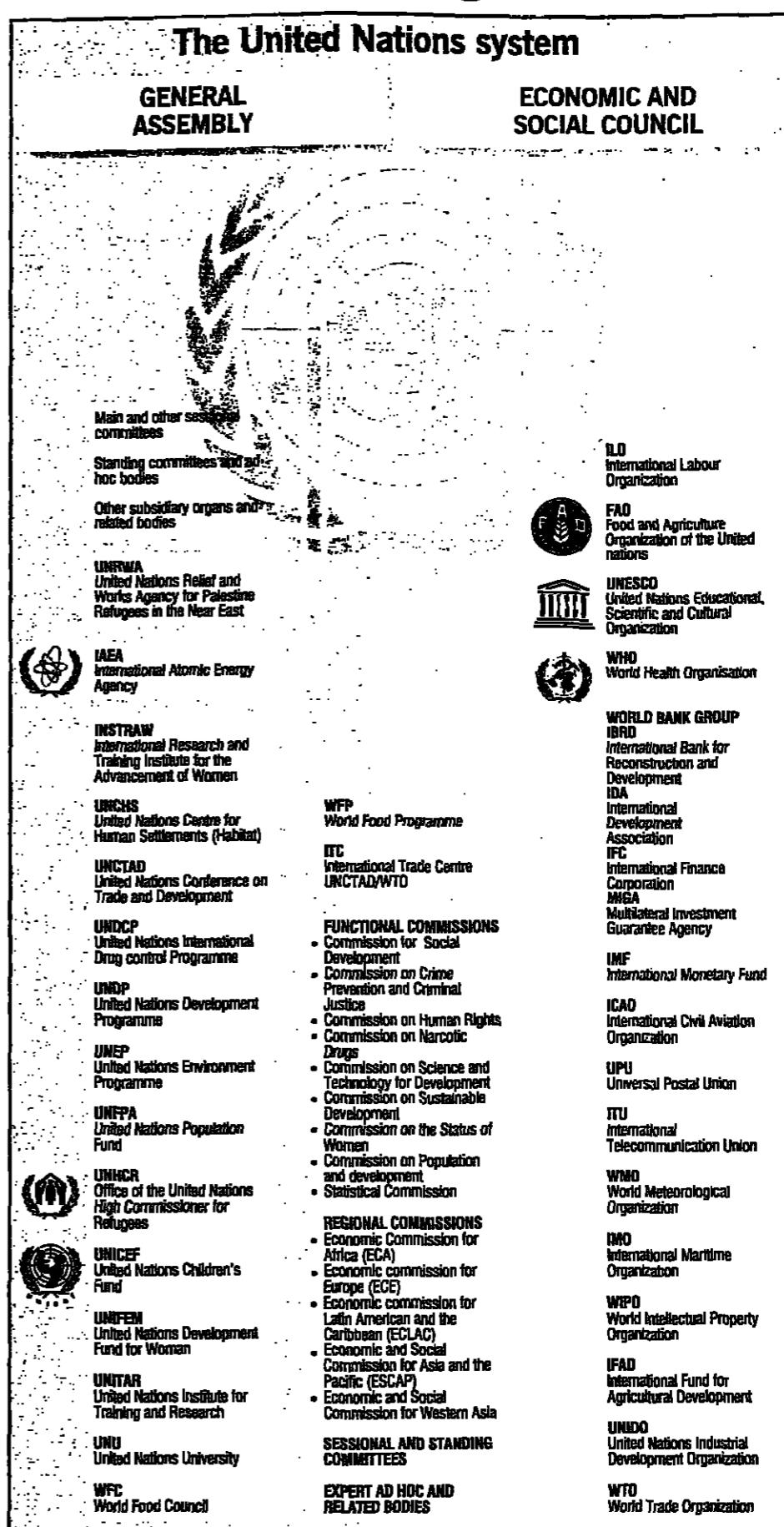
The EU document, obtained by *The Independent*, states: "We believe that it remains regrettably the case that the impact of many UN programmes and operations in the field is too often undermined by the lack of adequate coordination, overlapping responsibilities and fragmentation of activities".

Mr Boutros-Ghali is empowered to make some of the changes unilaterally, particularly as regards streamlining and staff structures within the Secretariat. The more far-reaching ideas, including most of Mr Speth's, would have to be sold to the wide membership, however, which would be a tough task. The debate would be complicated by widespread suspicion that the prime motive of the US is to cut the UN's budget rather than strengthen its role.

In this regard, Mr Speth takes direct aim at the US. "Some of the reformers most vocal about the need for a rationally organized, better managed and more cost-effective organisation have confronted the organization with severe financial pressures, thus creating the impression that their real agenda may be to diminish the United Nations vis à vis other centres of international leadership or, at best, to reduce the United Nations to a 'boutique'."



All change: Boutros Boutros-Ghali, UN Secretary General, will offer some initial conclusions on tackling reform next month. Photograph: FSP/Gamma



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Norway PM quits amid rumours of top UN job

Tony Barber
Europe Editor

Gro Harlem Brundtland, one of Norway's most distinguished politicians since independence in 1905, took her compatriots by surprise yesterday when she said she would resign tomorrow as Prime Minister. She insisted her decision was purely a matter of domestic politics, but the announcement fuelled speculation that she might be a candidate for the post of United Nations Secretary-General.

Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the incumbent, who is from Egypt, will soon complete his first term, and the United States has made public its desire to see a new person in the job. However, he has indicated he will not go quickly, and a number of countries, including France, have signalled that they would be happy to see him stay in the job.

Mrs Brundtland, 57, Norway's Prime minister for 10 of the past 15 years, would appear to have excel-

lent qualifications for the post of secretary-general. A strong-minded, hard-working champion of women's rights, environmental issues and Third World development, she led a UN commission that produced a study of the world's environment in 1987 which quickly became known as the Brundtland Report.

It was with her approval that Norwegian officials brokered a peace agreement between Israel and the PLO during a series of secret meetings in Norway. As the NTB news agency observed, "her involvement in international affairs has led to her being known in countries that scarcely would have been aware of Norway otherwise".

However, she is no stranger to controversy. She shocked some of her international admirers in 1992 by announcing Norway would resume whale-hunting in defiance of the International Whaling Commission's world-wide ban.

Mrs Brundtland confined herself yesterday to saying: "I feel I have

done a reasonable job for a number of years ... I am in good shape. At 57, one hopes to have many good years to work. I think there are many exciting things I could do."

She told parliament that she had advised Norway's constitutional monarch, King Harald V, to appoint Thorbjørn Jagland, 46, the leader of her own Labour Party, as her successor.

Being outside the EU seems not to bother a country whose oil and gas wealth has turned it into one of the richest in the world. While most EU countries are grappling with high unemployment, low growth, excessive budget deficits and welfare systems in urgent need of reform, Norway has a booming economy, relatively few people out of work, a budget surplus, and a generous and sophisticated welfare system.

Mrs Brundtland, who studied public health at Harvard University, was elected to parliament in 1977 and took over the Labour Party leadership in 1981. She resigned that job in 1992 after her son Joergen, one of four children, committed suicide.



Time's up: Gro Harlem Brundtland, with her personal secretary, Oystein Singsaas, arriving at the press conference yesterday at which she announced that she was stepping down. Photograph: AFP

Italy faces up to ghosts of Fascist past

Andrew Gumbel
Rome

Embarrassed by the uproar surrounding the trial of former SS captain Erich Priebke, military prosecutors across Italy are digging through old files for the first time in decades and launching investigations into ex-Nazis responsible for war crimes at the end of the Second World War.

In a rush of activity that follows on from nearly 50 years of almost total silence on the subject, military tribunals in Verona, La Spezia, Turin and elsewhere are all looking for possible cases to prosecute. One has already emerged – another former SS captain who ordered the shooting of 15 partisans in Milan in August 1944, at the height of the civil war pitting resistance fighters against Italians loyal to the puppet Fascist republic of Salo.

The shooting became such a symbol of partisan outrage that when Mussolini and his mistress, Clara Petacci, were captured and shot at the end of the war, their bodies were brought to the same site in Piazzale Loreto and hung upside down as a crude gesture of revenge.

Prosecutors in Turin announced this week that they were seeking an indictment against the former captain, who has lived in Germany since the war. They did not name him, but he is believed to be Theodor Säwecke, now in his early eighties, who was stationed with the SS in Milan in 1944.

This renewed interest in prosecuting Nazis, an activity the Italians have not engaged in since 1948, is due almost entirely to the Priebke case – an affair that has highlighted Italy's previous reluctance to come to terms with the darker episodes of its past.

Priebke was extradited from Argentina a year ago after be-

ing "discovered" by a US television crew, and put on trial for his role in the massacre of 335 civilians in the Ardeatine Caves outside Rome in June 1944. The military court that heard his case, however, chose not to send him to jail, on the grounds that he had been under severe pressure to obey orders.

That verdict, which outraged the Italian establishment, was deemed a shoddy piece of justice and eventually quashed on appeal last week. Priebke will now appear in the dock again sometime in mid-December, joined this time by a fellow former SS officer, Karl Hass, who originally appeared at the trial as a witness for the prosecution.

One of the themes to emerge from the first trial was that Italy not only turned its back on war crimes after 1948, the date of the last big military tribunals, but actively sought to bury them. One military prosecutor, Sergio Dini of Padua, has alleged that thousands of cases were deliberately consigned to the archives in the 1950s and 1960s.

The renewed activity looks like a belated attempt to make up for this long period of bad faith. It could prove too hot to handle. By chasing old Nazis, the Italians risk opening a can of worms about the behaviour of their own citizens.

The massacre for which Säwecke is being pursued is a case in point. Although ordered by Kesselring, the supreme German commander in Italy, it was carried out by Italians loyal to Mussolini. If military prosecutors are going to pursue the German officers, then logic dictates they must sooner or later start delving into the cases of surviving Italians. That kind of investigation, with all the national soul-searching that it implies, may be more than Italy is prepared to countenance.

Portillo warns of war threat

Christopher Bellamy
Defence Correspondent

Nato must remain prepared to fight "high-intensity conflicts" that may be "short and sharp", and not necessarily distant from western Europe, or with the low levels of casualties that have characterised recent operations in the Gulf and Bosnia, Britain's Secretary of State for Defence, Michael Portillo, said yesterday.

Latest intelligence assessments list 53 potential crisis points, including the Balkans, Transcaucasia, Algeria, Libya and Iraq. Of those, 17 lay within 200 miles of Nato's borders. He also said that it should in future be "the norm for Nato to consult Russia on changes in which it could have an interest".

Mr Portillo's speech to the Royal Institute for International Affairs in Brussels – entitled "European security, Nato and 'hard' defence" – was designed to stress that although recent military operations have been distant and relatively free of casualties, they are not "reliable models for all likely future operations". "This is not the time for Nato to go soft, and certainly not to convert itself into an organisation mainly capable

of peacekeeping operations", Mr Portillo said.

He focused on what he called "hard defence" – intense, though possibly brief operations in which there would be no time to learn. "There will be no opportunity for us to generate conscript reserves or to manufacture new weaponry ... We must plan on the basis that what you start with is all you'll get."

The speech – probably the most significant Mr Portillo has made on the character of future conflict and international security – was made in the context of imminent Nato expansion, and was designed to stress the importance of Nato as the link between a greater European defence identity and the US.

Outside Nato there are about 35 countries equipped with up-to-date tanks and artillery; 40 have modern offensive aircraft; 30 have modern submarine forces; 20 possess ballistic missiles and some Nato territory is within range of missiles fired from the Middle East.

"The likelihood of conflict is, if anything, increasing", Mr Portillo said. "For, as the risk of global catastrophe has reduced, the risk of geographically limited conflict has increased."



لقاء مع رئيس الوزراء



Military figure: Veterans of the uprising at a statue of Imre Nagy, who came to embody the revolt and died for it

Photograph: Reuter

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Adrian Bridge
Budapest

In twos and threes the groups of mainly elderly mourners walked among the tombstones and laid their floral tributes. The largest bouquets were reserved for Imre Nagy, the reforming Communist who came to embody the 1956 Hungarian National Uprising and who paid for it with his life.

Fejes Maria Szentene recalled the heady days 40 years ago when thousands of Hungarians took to the streets to rid the country of Soviet rule. "I was only 10 but it was a great thing to be alive at that time," she said. "As a nation we were united, all fighting together for

freedom and independence. Every year I like to come here to remember that." In addition to Nagy, an estimated 400 people were sentenced to death in the clampdown that followed the crushing of the uprising by Soviet tanks.

For years their bodies lay in an unmarked grave in Plot 301 of Budapest's Újpest cemetery. Deliberately unmarked and concealed, the graves had an unwelcoming air: soldiers stood on guard to deter unwanted mourners. With the demise of Communism in 1989, the graveyard was spruced up and the victims of the uprising reburied in their own plots. As Hungarians collectively paused yesterday to reflect on the anniversary of the start of the uprising, a steady flow of people came to pay their respects.

For Gyorgy Bekesi, it was harrowing: his father, Bela, was one of those executed. One of his only recollections of his father is as a three-year-old, visiting him in prison and sitting on his lap shortly before he was hanged. "I knew very little of my father but at least I know that he died for what he believed in," said Mr Bekesi. "Of course, it was a great shame that the uprising had such a tragic outcome

but, 40 years on, everyone can see that its cause was just."

The leaders of the uprising also announced that Hungary would withdraw from the Warsaw Pact alliance and hold free and fair elections.

At a ceremony marking yesterday's anniversary, President Arpad Goncz, who was jailed for several years for his role in the uprising, said that although the occasion belonged to those who participated, it was time to hand the "flame of freedom" to the younger generation.

But the ceremonies were also marked by bitterness over the fact that some of the Hungarians responsible for suppressing the uprising have subsequently had to face trial and that the contents of the files detailing what everybody did remain secret.

Many commemorating the anniversary were irked by the fact that 40 years ago Gyula Horn, the present Socialist Prime Minister, was in a pro-Moscow militia unit that helped put down the rebellion. "We may be able to come and mourn our dead freely now, but we can hardly talk of justice having been done yet," said Mr Bekesi. "The heirs of the murderers are still among us."

US rearms Muslims in Bosnia

Christopher Bellamy
Defence Correspondent

A massive arms shipment for the Muslim-Croat Federation forces in Bosnia will arrive at the Adriatic port of Ploce tomorrow. The shipment is part of the United States' "train-and-equip" programme and is the first overt shipment of heavy weaponry to one of the former warring factions in Bosnia since the start of the three-and-a-half-year civil war in 1992. It comprises 45 tanks, 79 armoured personnel carriers (APCs), 15 helicopters, ammunition and communications equipment.

An initial shipment of 1,000 M-16 rifles and ammunition arrived last August; the heavy equipment forms the bulk of the \$100m (£63m) deal.

It is expected that the federation will have to scrap some old military equipment in order to

remain within the weapons ceilings laid down in last year's Dayton peace agreement. None of the US equipment is at the cutting edge of military technology, but it is substantially better than anything the federation had available in the war.

Although the US is also providing troops for the Nato-led international peace implementation force (I-For) in Bosnia, the arm-and-train mission, run by ex-US officers under the auspices of a private firm, MPRI (Military Professional Resources, Inc.), is being kept quite separate.

I-For officers are uneasy about arm-and-train, which they find potentially embarrassing as it is taking place in parallel with

efforts to maintain the peace. In the summer, the Bosnian Serbs accused I-For of helping supply federation forces with armoured vehicles and missiles. An I-For spokesman said, "the only thing we care about is if they start moving them around".

During the war, the Muslims and Croats – sometimes fighting the Serbs, sometimes each other – were heavily out-gunned by the Bosnian Serb army. The Muslims managed to repair some weapons, build simple mortars and probably received some supplies covertly from Iran. The Dayton peace agreement laid down ceilings for armaments in the former Yugoslavia. Within Bosnia, the Muslim-Croat Federation is allowed twice as many weapons in the key categories of tanks, artillery, APCs, helicopters and aircraft as the Bosnian Serbs.

MPRI, based in Alexandria, Virginia, took two months to set up its operation, based in the Holiday Inn in Sarajevo. This month, it began training troops from the Bosnian government army and the Bosnian Croat militia (the HVO), at a military academy near Sarajevo. The company is concentrating on training officers and senior NCOs who have experience from the war and will form the core of the future federation army's officer corps. But they have also started field training for two Bosnian Army "brigades".

An MPRI spokesman said that the shipment of equipment would be transferred by road from Ploce, in Croatia, to depots in Bosnia.

Poll rulings back far right

Mary Dejevsky
Paris

The extreme-right National Front was unfairly beaten in a hotly contested city council election last year. France's supreme judicial authority has ruled, and the election is to be re-run. The Council of State found that the winning candidate in Dreux, an ailing industrial town west of Paris, breached electoral rules on combining professional and political activity.

All the councillors of the centre-right majority resigned yesterday on learning of the judgment against their mayor, Gerard Hamel, a Gaullist, precipitating new elections. A similar judgment is believed to be imminent in the case of Vitrolles, north of Marseille, where the incumbent mayor defeated a National Front candidate in the second round of

the election, but is now accused of exceeding campaign spending limits.

In both towns the National Front easily topped the poll in the first round, but lost the second round after two weeks of frantic attention from mainstream parties, which staffed expensive centrally-located campaign centres and rushed in floods of posters and literature.

Both they and the media treated the towns as bellwethers of French opinion that could not be "lost". In the even three cities, Orange, Marignane and Toulon – which had not been subject to this treatment – fell to the National Front.

In Dreux, the National Front candidate, Marie-France Stirbois, is now back on the campaign stump, and the Front's leaders are basking in what they call the "degeneracy" of the country's political establishment.

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Democrats take off in battle for Congress

Rupert Cornwell
Washington

The US Presidential race of 1996 may be about as tepid a mismatch as a Mike Tyson come-back fight. But the battle for Congress, which the Republicans recaptured two years ago for the first time since the Eisenhower era, has turned into one of the most complex, testing and unpredictable ever.

The question is simply put: will the Democrats make the net gain of three, that with the 51-break vote of Vice President Al Gore, would suffice to give them a majority in the Senate, and the net gain of 19 in the House of Representatives that would end Newt Gingrich's two years as Speaker? Right now, however, not even the most brazen of political analysts will venture an answer.

"A fortnight ago I would have given both chambers to the Democrats, but now I'm not so sure," said Charles Cook, author of the respected *Cook Report*. "It's going to be a fun night on November 5."

And even then it might not be over. If things are really close,

THE US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Authorised, are reluctant to entrust too much power to a single party, and prefer divided government. Hence the emergence in the closing stages of the campaign of the "blank cheque" argument.

There was something close to a public acknowledgement that Mr Dole is doomed from the Republican party chairman, Haley Barbour, this week. Should President Clinton be re-elected, he declared, "then the last thing the American people want for him to have a blank cheque in the form of a liberal Democratic Congress".

And on the campaign trail, Mr Clinton himself makes the same point by omission. He may be cruising to victory, and the polls increasingly suggest a Democratic edge in the generic vote for the 435 House seats nationwide—but he knows full well his own recovery largely reflected public fear of Republican excesses on Capitol Hill. Never

gains in the South. In the House too, a successful President's "coat-tails" usually have more effect.

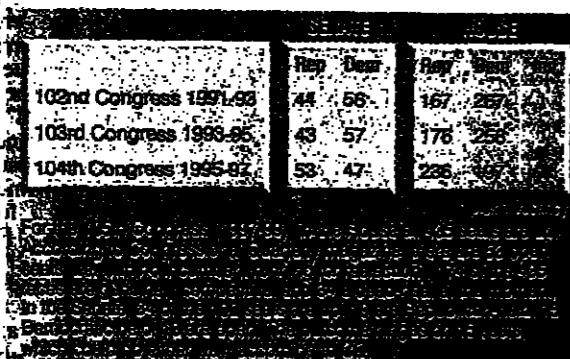
However, there is no guarantee. Every sign is that the public is more than happy at the way Congress has functioned these past few months – how a Clinton sobered by the defeat of 1994, and Republicans chastened by their miscalculation in shutting down the government a year ago, have combined to overhaul welfare and produce a small but popular measure of health-care reform.

But turnout, which could again drop below 50 per cent, may be the key.

In the past, low turnouts have helped Republicans. But scant public interest in the campaign, Mr Dole's anaemic performance and his dismal poll showings, could discourage some of his supporters from voting at all.



Dousing: A Super Scooper flies over a smoke-obscured ridge as it drops 1,400lbs of water on a hotspot in Malibu, California, yesterday, where wildfires had raged over several thousand acres, destroying several homes. Photograph: Reuter



The outcome in the House could be decided by run-off elections in December in a dozen Congressional districts in Texas, where primaries that should have been held earlier in the year were held up by a court ruling over redistricting.

Paradoxically, higher Republican hopes of retaining control of Congress stem from the very decline of Mr Dole. Americans, it is widely and plausibly

significant shorts

Slovaks brush aside concerns over Nato

The Slovak parliament brushed aside worries about the country's relationship with Nato and the European Union by approving the first of several controversial laws.

Deputies of the three-party coalition approved a law giving the public

prosecutor's office

unprecedented supervisory and executive powers which even President Michal Kovac has rejected. Yesterday's vote was taken a day after the US and EU ambassadors indicated Slovakia must improve its record on democratic reform and commitment to the rule of law if it wants to join the EU and Nato. Reuter - Bratislava

Belgian king speaks out

King Albert of Belgium called for international co-operation to stamp out the kind of exploitation of children and trade in humans seen in his country's paedophile scandal.

In a speech at a banquet in his honour in Japan last night, the king said Belgium and Japan must "act resolutely against these two terrible moral plagues", and added that "efficient co-operation between nations is urgently needed." The King and Queen Dona Paola arrived in Japan on Monday for a five-day state visit. Reuter - Tokyo

Farmers' rally turns sour

A mass rally in the Swiss capital to protest declining living standards for farmers ended in chaos when police turned on demonstrators with rubber bullets, water cannon and tear gas. More than 10,000 people, including women and children, took part in the demonstration in Bern. The Swiss Farmers' Union director, Melchior Ehrler, described the police action as "completely irresponsible". AP - Bern

Mitterrand's doctor to pay damages

A court ordered François Mitterrand's doctor to pay 340,000 francs (\$44,000) in damages to the late French President's relatives, and upheld a ban on the book disclosing details of his final cancer.

Dr Claude Gubler had already been sentenced to a four-month suspended sentence for breaching medical secrecy by revealing in *Le Grand Secret* ("The Big Secret") that Mitterrand had allegedly misled the French people for over a decade about the cancer which killed him. Reuter - Paris

Egypt bans newspapers

Egypt has banned the distribution of two weekly newspapers because of material rejected by censors, their chief editors said.

Michael Howard, editor at the English-language weekly *The Middle East Times*, said the censors stopped the distribution of the paper because it failed to remove the front-page teaser to an article which it had already withdrawn, which analysed 15 years of rule by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

The ban at the Arabic weekly *al-Dustour* "came just 10 days after the Israeli sent [the Foreign Minister] a letter objecting to a picture we ran of [the Israeli Prime Minister] Netanyahu with a Nazi swastika on his forehead," editor Ibrahim Issa said. Reuter - Cairo

Kedah makes clean flush of it

Malaysia's Kedah state wants to have the cleanest public toilets in the country.

Kedah's Chief Minister, Sanusi Junid, announced his government will dedicate November to cleaning toilets in schools, restaurants, coffee shops, hospitals, offices and bus stations. Broken toilets will also be fixed as part of the "Toilet Cleaning Month". AP - Kuala Lumpur

On the edge of a conversation. One of the loneliest places on earth.

obituaries / gazette

Denis Owen

Denis Owen was one of the leading British ecologists and naturalists of the century. His outstanding contribution to research in ecology and related disciplines is recorded in the 240 scientific papers, 40 popular articles and 10 books which have flowed from his pen in a steady stream since 1949 when he was only 18 years old.

He attended Roan Grammar School, Greenwich, leaving school at 16 with a modest School Certificate to work in the Bird Room at the British Museum (Natural History). After two years spent classifying bird skins he left for National Service at 18. His later pre-eminence as a field ornithologist owed much to this early training.

From 1951 to 1958 Owen was a Field Assistant at the Edward Grey Institute for Field Ornithology, Oxford University, under its eminent Director Dr David Lack, who soon recognised Owen's ability and recommended him for a degree course in Zoology at Oxford. Remarkably, Owen had already written 43 papers by the time he graduated in 1958. In 1955 he

met the highly talented Jennifer Bak, also an undergraduate zoologist, who was to become his first wife and long-term research collaborator.

Immediately upon graduation in 1958 Denis and Jennifer married and left Oxford to become Teaching Fellows at the University of Michigan; they also engaged in research for PhD degrees, he working on owls and she on wasps.

During his four years in the US, Owen not only obtained a doctorate but diversified his research interests to include insects. He collected the first records from the New World on the phenomenon, much researched in England, of industrial melanism in the peppered moth. He also investigated the ecological genetics of spittle bugs.

In 1962 Owen moved to the University of Lund as Professor of Tropical Ecology. During two years in Sweden he continued to publish on tropical ecology but also expanded his interests in temperate and Arctic ecology. In 1973 he was appointed Principal Lecturer in Biology at Oxford Polytechnic, now Oxford Brookes University.

of the African butterfly fauna. At the same time, he began to observe and collect data on human ecology, a subject which was to become a major teaching and research interest.

Owen left Uganda in 1966 with an already established reputation as a tropical ecologist to take the Chair of Zoology at Fowey Bay College (shortly to become the University of Sierra Leone) at the early age of 35. Here his research on the ecology and genetics of butterflies, moths and snails continued apace and in 1971 he published *Tropical Butterflies*, one of his more important books. During this period (1967-68) he was also Director of the UNESCO Biology Teaching Project for Africa, based in Ghana.

In 1971 Owen moved to the University of Lund as Professor of Tropical Ecology. During two years in Sweden he continued to publish on tropical ecology but also expanded his interests in temperate and Arctic ecology. In 1973 he was appointed Principal Lecturer in Biology at Oxford Polytechnic, now Oxford Brookes University.

In 1974 he wrote *What is Ecology?* The second edition, revised by Jennifer Owen, was an outstanding success and has been translated into five foreign languages. Ten years later his voice became familiar to listeners to the BBC World Service with his broadcasts from Spain on natural history (with John Burton) and his own series *What's in a Name?*, the latter also published by the BBC as a book. With Peregrine Holt, he was a frequent guest lecturer and guide on their nature excursions to places such as northern Greece, the Nile

Valley, the Seychelles, Belize, Guatemala and the Arctic.

His own prodigious research output continued unabated and embraced yet new fields such as butterfly evolution in the Atlantic Islands, desertification, the management of nature reserves, rabies and the ecological implications of virus research.

Owen's international status as an ecologist was increasingly recognised as several universities and institutions awarded him consultancies and visiting professorships: the University of

Massachusetts (1974), the Secretary for International Ecology (1974), the United Nations University (1977-79), the University of Bergen (1990-91) and the University of Florida (1991-92).

In this, the year of his untimely death, he was involved in the preparation or publication of no less than 10 papers with various collaborators covering fields as diverse as mimicry and evolution in African butterflies, butterfly migration, industrial melanism in the peppered moth, the ecological genetics of the scarlet tiger moth, genetic diversity in both land snails and marine bivalve molluscs and a biography of the entomologist J.W. Tuft.

He remained active to the end: on the very day of his death, I received a letter from him on the subject of a paper we are writing together, and he continued writing to within three days of his death. He leaves behind him mountains of unpublished records, all meticulously filed or recorded in field notebooks, and extensive insect collections from all continents. Denis Owen's relatively hum-

ble origins and somewhat deficient schooling, would have proved an insurmountable barrier to many. And yet his monumental contribution to knowledge demonstrated with startling clarity how natural ability, when combined with inexhaustible energy and drive, can triumph over early disadvantage. He was a tireless and astute observer of minutiae and an immaculate recorder but possibly the greatest of his many talents was his ability, in both speech and writing, to communicate ideas in clear and concise English.

David A.S. Smith

Denis Frank Owen, naturalist, teacher, writer and broadcaster; born London 4 April 1931; Lecturer, Makerere University, Uganda 1962-66; Professor, University of Sierra Leone 1966-71; Professor, University of Lund, Sweden 1971-73; Principal Lecturer, Oxford Brookes University 1973-76; married Jennifer Bak 1958 (one son, one daughter; marriage dissolved 1994); died Oxford 3 October 1996.

Eric Malpass

Eric Malpass was a rare creature – a highly successful English novelist who was virtually unknown in England. His reputation and his success were made almost entirely in Europe – in particular in Germany, where he is a household name. More paradoxical still, the setting of his books was always England; often nostalgic reveriations of family life in an idealised English countryside, written with a wit and warmth that stopped just short of sentimentality.

Malpass worked for Barclays Bank for 39 years, until in the mid-fifties he took the risk of leaving to try and earn a living as a full-time writer. While at the bank he had written short stories for the BBC, and for a range of magazines such as the now defunct *45/55*; in 1953 he won the *Observer Short Story Competition*. His first novel, *Beefy Jones*, published in 1957, won the Palma d'Oro in Italy for the best humorous novel of the year.

Nine years later, after resigning from the bank, his second novel, *Morning's At Seven*, recently published in England, to modest success, was taken by Rowohlt in Germany. The publishers were as astonished as the author when *Morgens um Sieben ist die Welt noch in Ordnung*



Populariser of haute cuisine: Franey (right) with his colleague Craig Claiborne. Photograph: Bill Aller

Pierre Franey died shortly after giving a cooking demonstration aboard the QE2. He was a household name – at least in those parts of America reached by the *New York Times*, because of his association with Craig Claiborne, for many years the paper's flamboyant but fundamentally shy food editor.

Franey and Claiborne's most notorious caper – the one that brought Franey to national prominence – was in 1975, when Claiborne bid but successfully bid \$300,000 in a Chamber 13 fundraising auction for a lot offered by American Express: dinner for two, anywhere in the world that accepted their charge card without any cost limit.

In a gesture that betrayed his many years as a restaurant critic, Claiborne chose Chez Denis in Paris, a place not listed (with good reason, it turned out) in the Guide Michelin.

Franey and Claiborne ate 25 dishes, not all of them delicious or even good. (The lobster, Claiborne later told a French reporter, was "chewyngame".) The bill was US \$4,000, most of it accounted for by the ten wines, including Latour 1918, Petrus 1961 and Yquem 1928. The most expensive meal for two ever eaten made headlines all over the world, among them the Vatican newspaper, which condemned the pair for gluttony and ostentation.

Franey had had the gastronomic good luck to be born in

Burgundy, and wrote in his 1994 autobiography *A Chef's Tale* of his idyllic childhood searching for snails and being fed the cheeses made in the neighbouring villages. By the time he was five years old, his family were calling him "Pierre le Gourmand".

In 1934 he went to Paris, working first as a *plongeur* in a bistro on the Place de la République. Before a year had passed he had found a place in the kitchen of Drouant, still the site of the annual Prix Goncourt dinner.

Franey, whose father was the Socialist mayor of the village of St Vinner, remembered the late 1930s in Paris as a time of terrible trials with right-wing thugs. So he accepted with alacrity the offer of a job with the team being assembled to cook at the French pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair.

That evolved into Le Pavillon, which under the ownership of Henri Soule, was America's first world-class French restaurant. Franey was promoted to head chef. Here Craig Claiborne met him in 1955 in the course of writing a feature about Le Pavillon. The following year Franey quarrelled with Soule over money, and quit, never to speak to him again. For a while he went slumming as a vice president of Howard Johnson, the national chain of restaurants and motels then best known for its fried clams

and many flavours of ice-cream. Claiborne wrote: "I have never known any chef with such an extraordinary ability to improvise and readily when working in the kitchen... a veritable Magician when he comes to cooking, failing to turn into triangles in knowing exactly how to make a culinary catastrophe into a thing of genius".

Franey must have been a good cook, because during the Second World War, when in the US Army, he was asked, but refused, to become General MacArthur's personal cook.

Claiborne resigned from the *New York Times* in the 1970s and got Franey to collaborate with him on a gastronomic newsletter. After its failure, Claiborne agreed to return to the paper in 1976, but only if it would also give a staff job to Franey, who became co-author of his "60-Minute Gourmet" column as well as "Equipment editor". The two travelled to restaurants all over the world and cooked together most weekends in the professionally equipped kitchen of Claiborne's cliff-top house at East Hampton, where Claiborne jotted down exquisitely precise notes that allowed him to reproduce the recipes in the Sunday *New York Times* magazine.

Franey was mild-mannered.

Claiborne says he lost his temper only once, when a wholesale butcher sent four completely

imprepared calves' heads for

the recipe for *le veau de veau* that was to appear in their

jointly authored veal cookbook. After trying in vain to singe the hair, an exasperated Franey told his young son Jacques to throw them over the cliff into the bay for the gulls to deal with. They washed up on the beach, were found by the locals, and caused an early animal rights scandal.

Arthur Gelb, managing editor of the *New York Times* in Franey's day said, "Before Franey, haute cuisine was confined to the palates of the privileged. In partnership with Craig Claiborne, he popularised it, leading the way in making it understood and relished by the general public." This is to take a very broad, slightly American-centred view of haute cuisine. *Veal Cookery* (1978) contains recipes for "Ed Giobbi's stuffed veal breast with Marsala" as well as "Kansas City chili" and "San Antonio Picadillo", with no fewer than three tinned ingredients. Moreover, when Claiborne's doctor put him on a low-sodium diet, Franey and "60-Minute Gourmet" decreed that the whole world could henceforward do without salt, thus renouncing the most basic ingredient in the diet of mankind.

Paul Levy

Pierre Franey, chef; born St Vinner, Burgundy, 13 January 1921; married 1948 Betty Chardner (one son and two daughters); died Southampton 13 October 1996.

(Claiborne added the following phrase of Browning's poem that immediately went to the top of the bestseller list of *Der Spiegel*, but which it remained for the next three years.)

The German reading public took Gaylord, the seven-year-old boy at the novel's centre, to their hearts, and over the next two decades, Malpass found himself writing five more books about him, as well as a trilogy of novels about Shakespeare and five other books including a novel based on the life of Thomas Cromer, whom he admires as a flawed man who finally found the strength to stand by his principles.

Morning's At Seven has now been published in more than 400 editions in 15 languages; it has been filmed in German (the theme tune, commissioned from James Last, became the BBC's signature tune for dancing), serialised on French television, and broadcast across Eastern Europe and elsewhere. Others of his books were also filmed in Germany (in one starring Peter Hall).

Eric Malpass lived close to his roots in the Midlands for about the last few years of his life. He was President of the Nottingham Writers Club and the Derby Writers Guild for over 40 years. He was gentle, musing, and much loved by all who had dealings with him. He leaves a widow, Muriel, and a son, Michael.

John McLachlin

Eric Lawson Malpass, banker and novelist; born Derby 9 November 1910; married 1936 (one son); died Bishop's Waltham, Hampshire 16 October 1996.

Tony Smith

Tony Smith was the doyen of tabloid political reporters. A veteran journalist and story getter, Smith would trawl the bars and restaurants at Westminster during lunch, return and declare to other lobby journalists "I've got a better". He was rarely wrong and the press gallery at Westminster would reverberate with the message "Stay late – Smudger's got a better."

His scoop included one about a foreign diplomat who had been preying on children but claimed diplomatic immunity to escape prosecution. The then prime minister Margaret Thatcher

confirmed the claims in the House, praised Smith's work and expelled the diplomat. Smith also created a sensation when he revealed that Yorkshire Police had secretly reopened investigations into the Moors murders more than 20 years after the original crime. Tony Smith had that rare talent. He could always see the best angle in a story and using his tact and formidable capacity to entertain would deliver the goods that editors wanted.

Allied to his professionalism Smith was a wonderful companion and colleague and his contacts in the management hi-

erarchy in newspapers was formidable. On one famous occasion he cautioned a disgruntled colleague not to resign for a better paid position on another paper. The journalist took the advice, was sacked the following day with a handsome pay-off and went straight to his new job very much the richer thanks to Smith.

He was born in 1945 into the austerity of post-war Yorkshire. Brought up on a council estate in Shipley, he was one of few to gain entrance to the local grammar school. Leaving school at 16 Smith joined the *Shipley Times and Express* before moving

to the *Doncaster Evening Post*, the *Birmingham Evening Mail* and then to the London office of the *Wolverhampton Express and Star*.

His Fleet Street career began in 1976 when he joined the *Daily Mail* as a general reporter. Three years later he joined the *Daily Star*, rising through the ranks to become political editor in 1985. In 1987 he joined the *Sunday Express* first as political editor and later as foreign editor. The foreign post was given to Smith by the then editor in the hope that he would fail. In fact, through dogged determination and excellent con-

tacts, as well as a good bit of "tap dancing", Smith was a great success and saw that particular editor off.

His love of politics was matched by his love of football. He supported both Leeds and Bradford and was an enthusiastic member of the press gallery soccer team at the House of Commons. A burly fullback, he played against politicians with all the compassion of a fork lift truck, upending MPs, ministers and peers with the same good natured disregard.

His background gave him a personal toughness and an ap-

preciation of real values that saw him through personal and professional crises but also gave him a compassion for the luckless in life and the quest to fight injustice.

In 1994 he returned to the *Daily Star* as political editor.

Although married Smith was estranged from his wife and was nursed with much devotion by his long-term companion Joy Raymond. He died at his home in the West Country.

Donna Prince

Anthony Smith, journalist; born Shipley, West Yorkshire 14 April 1945; died 16 October 1996.

The Court ruled that there had been no infringement of article 6. In regulating access to its courts, a state could impose such limitations as were legitimate and proportionate, so long as they did not restrict the right of access to such an extent that the very essence of the right was impaired.

The European Court of Human Rights ruled by seven votes to two that, in applying the Limitation Act 1980 to dismiss claims by Leslie Stubbings and three other applicants for damages for sexual abuse by various adults during the applicants' childhood, there had been no violation of articles 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The court also ruled, unanimously, that there had been no violation of article 8; and by eight votes to one that there had been no violation of article 14.

Article 6 provides: "In the determination of his civil rights and obligations... everyone is entitled to a... hearing by a tribunal". By article 8, "Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life". By article 14, the enjoyment of Convention rights "shall be secured without discrimination on any ground".

Article 8 clearly applied to these complaints, which concerned a matter of "private life". Although its object was essentially to protect the individual against arbitrary interference by public authorities, it might also impose positive obligations involving the adoption by the state of measures designed to secure respect for private life even in the sphere of relations between individuals.

Sexual abuse was unquestionably an abhorrent type of wrongdoing. Children and other victims were entitled to state protection, in the form of effective deterrence; from such grave interference with their private lives. Such protection was, however, already afforded by the criminal law. Article 8 did not require states to secure respect for private life by the provision of unlimited civil remedies where criminal sanctions were in operation.

Finally, the court found that the difference in the 1980 Act between its treatment of victims such as the applicants, who had been subjected to deliberate injury, and those who were victims of negligence, did not amount to "discrimination" contrary to article 14.

The six-year time limit was not unduly short. It was proportionate to the aims sought to be achieved. It was not for the court to substitute its own view as to the appropriate proportionality in this regard.

Paul Magrath, Barrister

Civil claims over sex abuse were time-barred

LAW REPORT

24 October 1996

Ms Stubbings, who was born in 1957, alleged that between the ages of two and 14 she was sexually abused by her adoptive father, Mr Webb, and his son Stephen, which caused her severe psychological problems. However, it was not until September 1984, following psychiatric treatment, that she realised for the first time there might be a connection between the childhood abuse and her mental health. In August 1987 she commenced proceedings against the Webb's, seeking damages for the alleged assault.

The House of Lords held (see *Stubbings v Webb* [1993] AC 498) that as it involved intentionally inflicted injury rather than negligence, the claim was subject to the six-year limitation period under section 2 of the 1980 Act. This could not be dispensed with by the court and began to run from the date of the plaintiff's 18th birthday. Ms Stubbings' claim was therefore out of time.

Similar claims by the other applicants, against their fathers or in one case their deputy headmaster at school, were discontinued following

Births, Marriages & Deaths

BIRTHS

Scare-mongering contests get us nowhere

Yesterday the Queen spoke and the nation yawned; it had been rather well briefed in advance. The announcement of the Government's legislative programme for the next six months was widely heralded as a bout of political point-scoring for the next few months, rather than as a serious law-making agenda for the country.

The trouble is that the pre-election party politicking and the serious business of law-making are inescapably linked. And given the direction in which the politics is heading as the parties compete for votes, the implications for our laws and public policy are rather troubling.

Take a step back for a moment from the political arguments and adopt what we might call the Martian pose. Suppose we had been beamed down for the first time in Britain yesterday. Suppose the content of yesterday's speech had been our first encounter with the contemporary social agenda. What would we have made of it all?

We would probably have twisted round in a panic, fearing for our immediate safety. Consider the Government's suggested legislation. The 13 proposed bills include a Crime Bill, a Police Bill, a Firearms Bill, a Fraud Bill, a Weapons Decommissioning Bill, and a Crime and Punishment Bill for Scotland. It sounds like an emergency programme for a state plagued by serious social disorder and lapped by anarchy.

New measures include more mandatory sentences for criminals, less parole and early release for prisoners, a new National Crime Squad, minimum sentences for drug dealers, crackdowns on benefit fraudsters, tougher controls on guns and disruptive children. It sounds a tough, even hysterically tough, agenda. This Britain is clearly in deep trouble.

And indeed, some of the reaction of the opposition parties would confirm it. Labour and Liberal Democrat politicians believe the Firearms Bill doesn't go far enough: more guns should be banned. And they are appalled that the Government originally intended to leave it to backbenchers proposed new legislation clamping down on suspected paedophiles and stalkers.

Listening to the Government and opposition, there seems little question about it: the British social fabric is crumbling, and coercive measures are needed to patch it back together. All the parties seem to be trying to convince us that the big problem in Britain has been decades of sloppy liberal governments, allowing standards of law and order slip, indulging criminals and layabouts alike.

But this is complete nonsense. British society is not faced with a crisis of order. And soft government is not the prime cause of any rents in the social fabric that may be emerging. Moreover the idea that the Conservatives, after 17 years in power, can claim to be the

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tough guys sweeping in at the last minute to save us from years of problems created by liberals is just laughable. If the troubles are that serious, they should take some of the blame for not tackling them years ago.

There are genuine social problems that we are right to be concerned about – including high rates of violent crime by teenagers from dysfunctional families living in areas characterised by poor education and high youth unemployment. But to slam down the lid is only half an agenda; many of the measures needed to grapple with crime and disorder are slow-burning. Alongside the

penal system we need to look at a much wider agenda, including welfare-to-work strategies; special programmes for troubled young people; lessons in parenting; the creation of an elite corps of highly paid teachers; and the planning, ownership and social ecology of housing estates. A government that really expected to be in power for another decade, and did not have one eye on electoral tactics, would propose measures in all those areas.

Quick-fix responses on their own fix nothing. They will only increase the overflowing prison population, without doing anything to stem the tide of new

offenders. And though Labour has policies on youth unemployment to its credit, there was little evidence of them yesterday. They and the Liberal Democrats would rather not be caught in public discussing the missing, expensive and essential part of the agenda.

All the political parties have clearly decided that there are votes to be won – or at least swing votes to be won – on this tough penal agenda. Clearly they believe that they can bid for public support with tougher and tougher criminal measures, blandly ignoring the deeper problems. That in itself is saddening. Unless the politicians are mistaken, it reflects badly on all of us.

But, even worse, there are no limits to this penal auction, no political checks and balances to stop it going too far. Because Labour has long been thought by the public to be weak on crime, the party is determined not to be caught out. As a result, no matter how far Michael Howard moves to the right, Labour seems destined to follow.

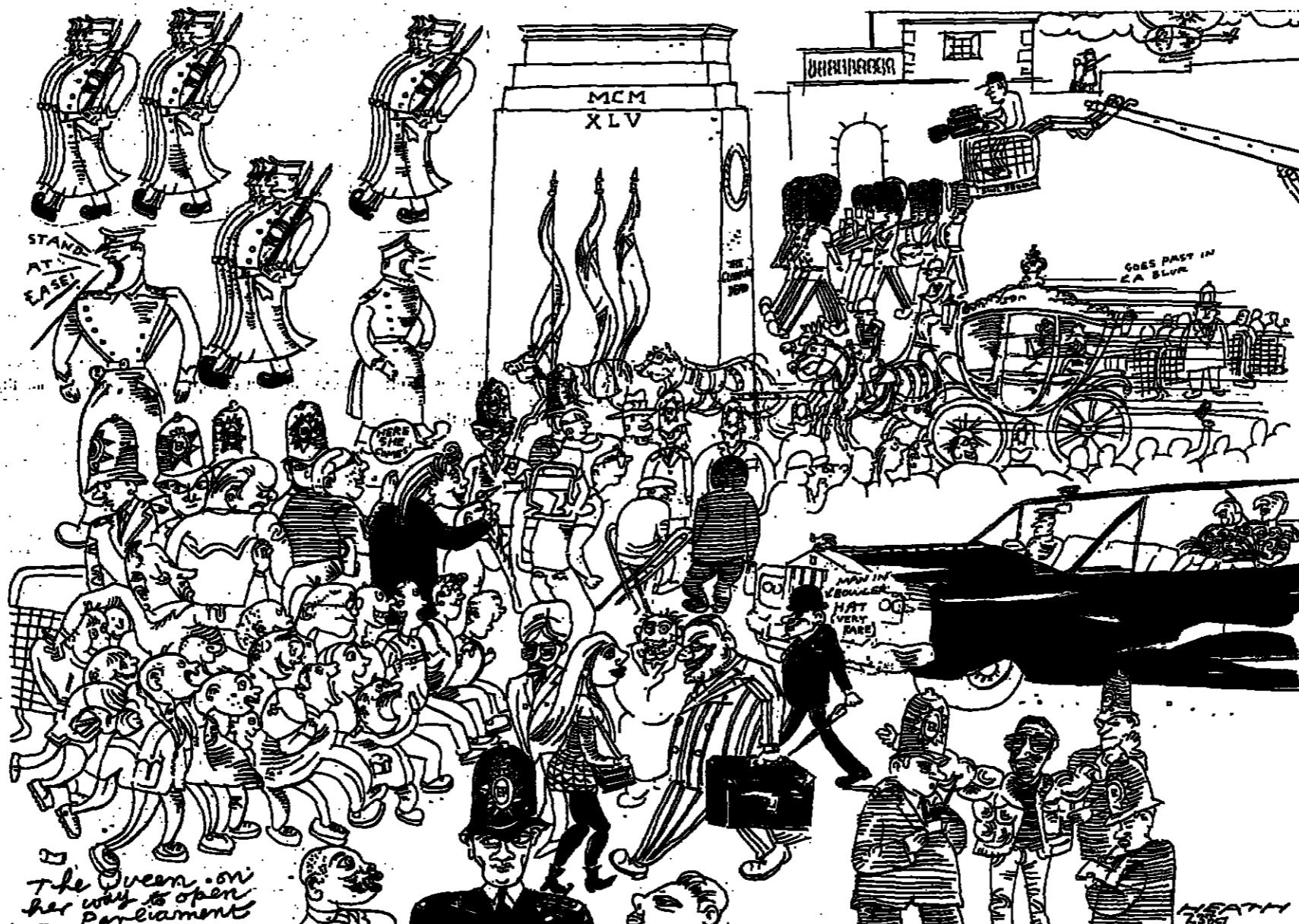
If this were simply a matter of political game-playing, charades and shadow-boxing carried out in advance of an election, it wouldn't be so bad. But these are proposed laws, not arguments, and even once the election is past, the new government, whatever its complexion, will have to live with the promises it has made, and the expectations it has raised in this competition to be tough on crime.

There are many individual proposals we agree with. What really worries us is what wasn't in the speech, and wasn't featured strongly in the debate which followed it. We are living in a relatively orderly and advanced society, well able to deal with its deeper problems if it chooses to. But this exhibition of competitive scare-mongering didn't make us certain of our leaders' determination to grapple with those problems. It was, as ever, a glittering and solemn occasion. But it wasn't an entirely grown-up one.

Peace offering of the paper tiger?

The bad news is that fun-loving Rupert Murdoch, 65, is raising £1.5bn in the US, mortgaging a chunk of BSkyB holding for some purpose. The word on the street is that it has something to do with American digital television. We know the real reason. Rupe has finally realised that despite all the money he ploughs in, he cannot help himself making rubbishy newspapers. So, in a peace offering, he has offered this sum to *The Independent*, in order that we may print on fine vellum-quality paper, recruit many more journalists, and so on. The good news, of course, is that we regard it as tainted money and will have nothing to do with it.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Shooters the scapegoats for Dunblane

Sir: Given the Government's response to the Cullen report I am still having some difficulty understanding why I and fellow legitimate pistol shooters are being punished for a horrendous crime committed by a Scottish madman. Those actions and tendencies were well known to the local police, but were negligently ignored.

Having never considered myself a latent psychopath, I still subscribe to the belief that the current law with minor amendments and if properly applied should be sufficient. We now have the Labour Party trying to outgun the Government by calling for a ban on all privately owned pistols.

These positions are apparently as a response to "overwhelming" public opinion. Pistol shooters, at around 57,000, are a small number, to scapegoat, with insignificant voting power. With a ban in place, the public gets an illusion of security with no loss on their part since they have no connection with the sport. Any excuse will next be used to tighten up further on ownership of rifles and shotguns. This will continue while there is an automatic but false association of firearms and violence in the public mind.

DR IAN STRAWBRIDGE

Muffield

Sir: As daughter of a firearms dealer, I am suffering already from the proposals to ban handguns.

As soon as the ban comes into force, my father will lose his business. He has been in business for 16 years and is over 50. How can he get another job? Compensation is essential, as many people's livelihoods will be searched away.

We stand to lose everything, including our house. My sister, who has recently passed three A-levels, can no longer go to university. I will not be able to achieve my ambition of becoming a performer, as the tuition is out of our price range now that my father will be out of a job. I am in my first year of A-levels (aged 16) and feel my future has gone.

I feel for the people who are linked in any way to the Dunblane massacre, but is it not time someone felt for us and our families? We have done nothing wrong.

CLOVER BROWN

Prestwood, Buckinghamshire

Sir: On 5 September 1914, a few weeks after the commencement of the Great War, the light cruiser HMS *Pathfinder* was torpedoed off the Firth of Forth by the German submarine U21. The ship sank very quickly and 270 of her crew perished.

One of those was Henry Ernest Morrison, a commissioned gunner. During his early service, Mr Morrison, in common with many army and naval officers, purchased his own sidearm. In his case a model 1896 Mauser pistol, identical to that purchased by a young officer called Winston Churchill. It was at that time a novel and advanced design. It is of course cumbersome by modern standards, being a century old.

Mr Morrison's pistol did not go down with HMS *Pathfinder*, and is now in my possession. It is in museum condition. It has been preserved in the state for over 80 years by private persons, who saw themselves, as I do, as a trustee of a valuable and poignant heritage item.

Mr Morrison has no grave – he went down with his ship. His only memorial is his name on the Chatham Naval Memorial and the

pistol, with his name on, in my possession. There are many such items in private ownership, and you may imagine my dismay when I heard that the intention was their destruction.

German citizens are now avid collectors of pistols from the Imperial era. It would be ironic indeed if the only way to prevent the destruction of Mr Morrison's pistol were by its export to the country which caused his death.

R F LEARNEY

Carlisle Beeches, Surrey

Sir: "Handgun" is an American word used in England by politicians who have no knowledge of the subject. What Thomas Hamilton used is a "combat weapon" designed to blow enemies to pieces.

It is a low-skill instrument held in some contempt by Olympic shooters. It must be banned.

The "Olympic pistol" is not

"lethal" (letter, 19 October) except in so far as a car, a baseball bat, a crossbow can be lethal. It is a variant of the .22 target pistol. It is designed to punch a tiny hole in cardboard when fired with deliberate steady aim at a stationary target. It fires five shots only.

It is quite prosaic to say that it could be used for another Dunblane. The momentum of the missile is a very small fraction of the bullets fired by Hamilton. Unless the victim is exceptionally unfortunate, it will not kill. Olympic shooters concede that an expert might manage to kill one person with it but you or I would certainly fail.

I never shoot, but feel strongly that this harmless Olympic sport should continue.

DEREK J COLE

St Leonards, East Sussex

Sir: I have seen several letters to newspapers claiming that the design of pistol targets is based on the human figure. "Humanoid" targets are used in only two pistol disciplines widely shot in the UK. One is shot on the Police Athletic Association target and the other on the standard British Army Figure 59/11. All other targets, for both fullbore and smallbore pistols, are of the "round black blob" variety.

A scoring ring on a piece of paper is exactly that, irrespective of the pattern surrounding it. Turning a gun on a human being calls for an entirely different psychological stance – which is why the deranged or those specifically trained to the task actually do it.

PETER BROOKESMITH

Kensington Rifle and Pistol Club

London W14

Sir: Jack Boteler (letter, 22 October) writes from Texas, but we live on this very crowded island. We have a police force we can call on immediately with a phone call.

In California six years ago when I suggested that we hooted at another car, my cousin pointed out that they might have a gun.

Nearby I walked along a smart avenue and saw signs saying "Armed Response" in each garden with the insignia of this or that security firm.

Driving and walking – two freedoms which we take for granted but which are constrained by the possession of arms.

Californians

NICK LANDAU

London SW16

Teachers turned into victims

Sir: We are horrified by the discussion over events at Ridings School ("Battle to ban 60 children from one school", 22 October). It is turning teachers into victims.

As teachers and parents ourselves we can fully empathise with the tiring efforts required to deal with unruly and rude children. However we cannot understand the elevation of these little horrors into goliathian monsters. Children are not becoming more violent, nor are they committing more crime. In 1996 there were 299 fewer convictions of under-21s than in 1981. Children have not become more beastly. Rather, stressed and hardworking teachers are being encouraged to blame children for their plight. Grow up and look at the real problems facing teachers!

TIFFANY JENKINS

BERNADETTE WHEELAN

Families for Freedom

London N5

Fear of Germany drives EU too

Sir: Donald Macintyre's article (22 October) on the Eurosceptics' fear of Germany is long overdue. Unfortunately, he omits to emphasise how the entire European project is driven by a like fear, and by France's in particular.

Our perspective is that of a wartime victor whereas France's is that of the vanquished.

However, it is not true that aid,

France understands only too well the need to grasp a historic opportunity and react positively to Germany's remarkable – and fleeting? – readiness to give up some of its sovereignty and be bound into some kind of federated Europe. For France, and perhaps for the rest of continental Europe, the probable problems and costs of EMU pale into insignificance beside the possible costs of Germany – and European nations – in general – unbundled.

R A RICHARDSON

London SE7

Sir: Were I Mr Eddie George ("The danger of blocking exchange safety valve", 21 October) I should be far more worried about the rate of interest needed to prevent a free-fall in sterling were Britain not in the first wave of monetary union and left to compete with the newest and strongest currency in the world. If he is worried about unemployment he should worry about a doubling or trebling of the premium on British corporate bonds which has prevented any expansion in our industrial investment.

Sir FRED CATHERWOOD

Balsham, Cambridgeshire

Aid debate

Sir: Jonathan Porritt ("Nothing in life is free", 21 October) rightly points out the Liberal Democrats' understanding that environmental and economic policies must be integrated if we are to take care for the environment seriously.

However, it is not true that aid,

international development and Third World debt were banished from our conference agenda. At Brighton this year we launched our aid paper *A World of Opportunity*, which was developed in discussion with NGOs and has widespread support among aid organisations.

We had a long debate, with delegates giving their approval to our policy to reach the UN's target of 0.7 per cent of GNP over 10 years, making the Liberal Democrats the only party committed to reaching the target.

RUPERT REDESDALE

(Lord Redesdale)

Liberal Democrat Overseas Aid

Spokesperson

House of Lords

London SW1

Drama at BBC

Sir: Good luck to Nick Elliott in his endeavours to camouflage the fact that ITV is relying on a dwindling number of bankers in its drama line-up (Media, 22 October). However, when he claims that the BBC's commitment to classic adaptations was kick-started during his 10-month stay at the Corporation it would appear that he swapped his car-park pass for a bout of amnesia when he left us.

It must have slipped his mind that a stream of BBC classics – *Clarissa*, *Middlemarch*, *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *Persuasion* – had already been transmitted or produced ahead of his arrival, and before the BBC wholeheartedly embraced *Pride and Prejudice*. ITV is now seeking to imitate this vein of success.

WILL WYATT

Chief Executive, BBC Broadcast

London W12

Fight them for the beeches

Sir: A profound moral issue faces the Department of the Environment following their inspection of the Rusland Beeches in Cumbria (report, 7 October).

The decision to support or refuse the application for the lifting of tree preservation orders on these old beeches by the Lake District National Park Authority will have far-reaching consequences for mature trees throughout the United Kingdom.

There is an increased trend to cut down large mature trees for safety reasons. We are losing beautiful old trees that provide a habitat to wildlife requiring rotting wood such as the uncommon noctule bats found in the Rusland Beeches.

Because the average person cannot rationalise statements about the safety of a tree, an "expert" is called upon to take on the responsibility of stating that a tree is safe, and it takes a lot of courage and understanding of mature trees to make this statement.

It is far too easy to do avoid the problem by pronouncing a tree to be dangerous. A tree felled will never prove one wrong.

The sense of outrage felt by the local people who intuitively know the trees are safe from their experience of them in all weather conditions is immense.

DR GEOFF DELLOR

Buckhurst Hill, Essex

Gay saints

Sir: With reference to your news item about the Bishop of Ripon ("Bishop sacked over gay blessing", 18 October), how is it that the Christian Church can canonise a gay couple in the fourth century yet in itself to recognise a gay couple in its fold?

St Serge and St Bacchus were canonised in the fourth century, according to John Boswell's *The Marriage of Likeness*. He cites other canonised couples as well.

MARTIN MOTTRAM

Cyber face

None of us, any more, is exempt. All of us are snared in the systems of computers, all pay our dues to cyberspace, snuffing around in our own patch of it. Every time you stick a bit of plastic in a machine, or pay a bill, or communicate with an organisation, you leave your tracks in it. But what is it exactly?

William Gibson, the science-fiction writer, is the poet of cyberspace. His achievement is not merely to have named it. ("Cyberspace" made its first appearance in his first novel, *Neuromancer*, published in 1984, whose sales are now in the millions.) It is to have made that darkness in which all of us now pad about like moles, visible. What Gerard Manley Hopkins did for the flight of the falcon, Turner for fog, Dali for the unconscious and William Burroughs for a brain deranged by junk, Gibson has done for the digital dimension. He has painted it for us so vividly and persuasively that those dreary keyboards and screens can never be the same again.

"The matrix is an abstract representation of the relationships between data systems," he starts off drily enough in his 1985 story *Burning Chrome*. "Legitimate programmers jack into their employer's sector of the matrix and find themselves surrounded by bright geometries representing the corporate data. Towers and fields of it ranged in the colourless non-space of the simulation matrix... Legitimate programmers never see the walls of ice they work behind, the walls of shadow that screen their operations from others..."

It begins soberly, but once the adrenaline starts churning it's a tour of the mountains of the moon on acid. The talent of Bobby, *Burning Chrome's* anti-hero, is to break into data systems by destroying these walls of "ice" that protect them. The narrator goes along for the ride:

"Ice walls flick away like supersonic butterflies made of shade. Beyond them, the matrix's illusion of infinite space... This is the far side of the ice, the view of the matrix I've never seen before... The core data tower around us like vertical freight trains, colour-

But given that he himself is

coded for access. Bright primaries, impossibly bright in that transparent void, linked by countless horizontals in nursery blues and pinks..."

Sure, it's overwrought. But such passages, which in *Neuromancer* encrust a fast, cruel (400 deaths), impossibly hip narrative, gave brilliant literary form to the previously inchoate longings and urges of the first generation of PC nerds.

If you were casting for the part of King Nerd, Gibson would be up there on the shortlist along with Bill Gates, being tall and stooped and narrow-shouldered, bespectacled and wry. The funny thing is that he's far from nerdy in his pre-occupations: he wrote *Neuromancer* on an ancient manual typewriter, and while he's graduated to a computer for word processing, he refuses to have an e-mail address, flinching at the thought of all the mail he would have to wade through.

Born 48 years ago in Virginia, he moved to Canada aged 19 as a precaution against being drafted for the Vietnam War, and for 20 years has been settled in suburban Vancouver, where he lives now with his wife and two children. Professionally he was a slow starter, spinning out his years studying Eng Lit until all his cronies drifted off to law school and the like. "When Punk arrived from London, I spent a year just watching it," he says.

He began writing and selling science fiction to a magazine called *Omni* in 1979-80 when he was in his late twenties. "They paid enough money that I couldn't stop," he says. Several of those stories – collected in a volume called *Burning Chrome* – are among the best things he's done. The first novel followed smoothly on.

Rarely in recent times has an author made such an explosive debut: *Neuromancer* won all three of America's science-fiction awards, and became an instant bestseller. "Cyberspace" entered the language, and a mantle of cool descended on a million anoraks. Gibson was rewarded with the nerds' eternal love. He has, for example, a drawer at home stuffed with audiocassettes by the 100 or so garage bands who have made recordings in homage to the book.

And although he'd never heard of the Internet when he was writing *Neuromancer*, he is also proud to be the prophet of its triumphalism – for the Internet is the ultimate realisation of the libertarian dreams of the Whole Earth Catalog types of the late 'Sixties.

He is a tough question. You can find what one critic calls "passages of heightened language" in a lot of science fiction from the Sixties on. In order to excuse them there had to be some technological or mythological rationale: OK, you've just gone into hyperdrive, OK, you've just swallowed the x33 tablets and your nervous systems are melting in rainbow colours... I remember needing an excuse for such passages. I had that need before I had the cyberspace idea, and I dreamed the cyberspace idea up to allow me to do that...

My real contribution is that I have given my readers an objective correlative for the digital universe. I'm proud of having done that."

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"I'm just a product of my time," he said three years ago. "Computers, in a sense, were invented by acid heads. Fractal geometry, as far as I can tell, was more or less discovered by old acid heads looking for the mathematical formulae that resembled an LSD hallucination."

In his new novel, *Idoru*, however, a truly dark new note enters his work. Because in this book, the squalor and desperation have their own kind of lurid glamour. And subverting the pessimism is a subtle Six-

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Do science fiction writers merely predict the future, or can they create it through their writing?

Peter Popham talks to William Gibson, inventor of cyberspace, about where we are headed next

and defender of an Internet that is free, as originally intended, of controls.

"The Internet could one day be seen as being terribly significant: something akin to the building of cities. It seems to me to be that unusual. It's quite unlike anything that was ever done before in a number of ways. It's immune to legislation because it's post-national and post-geographical. Because of the reasons for its initial design and the nature of its architecture, because it's designed to shift packets of information in the wake of or even during a nuclear war, it's impossible to control the flow of information within it. That may be the grand irony of the Cold War era: what we remember the Cold War for is, not only did we not drop the bomb, but we created what may one day be seen as the really major part of the universe: this place where we increasingly do more and more of everything we call society."

Gibson has been called the George Orwell of the computer age, but the parallel is flawed. The world of his books is as desperate and eco-catastrophic as that of *Blade Runner* (it opened while Gibson was writing *Neuromancer* – "I fled the cinema after 15 minutes, deeply dismayed, because it looked exactly like the pictures on the inside of my forehead, actually it looked better"). But, as in *Blade Runner*, the squalor and desperation have their own kind of lurid glamour. And subverting the pessimism is a subtle Six-

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Don't let that budgie destroy your life...



Miles Kington

How often should a budgerigar's cage be cleaned? J Millington Smythe writes: You are not contractually obliged to clean your budgerigar's cage at all, of course, unless you signed a contract when you acquired your bird from the pet shop. I very much hope you did not do this, as people have sometimes been caught in long-term and crippling arrangements with pet shops.

I had a client once who signed an agreement with a pet shop which committed her not only to cleaning her bird's cage every day, but also to entering a time-share arrangement over a villa in Spain AND taking out a very expensive life insurance policy.

On herself? J Millington Smythe writes: No, it is a highly dangerous precedent. By accepting payment from your pet, you are in effect entering into an unspoken agreement, de facto rather than de jure, which commits you to repeating the service on a regular basis.

You could therefore, and I do not exaggerate, be sued

for neglect if you do NOT keep up the regular cleaning of the cage, and the sunflower seed would be cited as an example of the payment changing hands.

Or, in her case, claws. By accepting the sunflower seed you are tacitly admitting liability.

Bud who would sue the owner? J Millington Smythe writes: The bird, of course.

How can a bird sue an owner?

J Millington Smythe writes: He need only get in touch with me and I can do the rest.

Has a bird ever successfully sued an owner?

J Millington Smythe writes: Oh, yes. I need only draw your attention to the classic case of Pal Joey vs Mrs Templeton, in 1958, in which Mrs Templeton was taken to the cleaners by a law firm acting for her budgie.

What was the outcome of the case?

J Millington Smythe writes: The lawyer won, of course. And the next, please!

I recently bought a dog for the first time and am wondering what information I should put on the brass tag on his collar, such as name, address etc, as there isn't a lot of room.

J Millington Smythe writes: DON'T, whatever you do, put the dog's name on. This will give any kidnapper a great advantage, as he will be able to call the dog by its name and get his trust. DON'T put your own phone number on it, as then the kidnapper will find it all too easy to ring you up and demand his demands. Do NOT give your address, as burglars often read these and then burgle the house when the watch dog is all too clearly absent.

What shall I put on, then?

J Millington Smythe writes: Ideally, nothing. If you MUST put something, write the name and phone number of the dog's solicitor.

J Millington Smythe will be back soon to deal with your inquiries about riding and winter sports. Keep those queries rolling in!

Take the fight out of the House and on to our screens

We really shouldn't be shocked that the Queen's Speech debate turned into such an electioneering opportunity yesterday. It's true that the speech and the Royal procession which precedes it is the annual acme of Merrie England. Maybe all that party politics does slightly undermine the heritage value of the ritual. But it's hardly a surprise, given that it's the last one of the Parliament. And at least something happened.

It's not every day you see, as you did yesterday afternoon, the leaders of the two main parties haggling and dealing across the Commons floor about bills for the new session. And after all, normal precedent suggests that this is the last time, apart from the twice-weekly point-scoring game of Prime Minister's Questions, that the voters will have a chance to see Tony Blair and John Major face-to-face before they go to the polls.

But is it? Or could we, at long last, see the two leaders debating with each other on television during the election campaign in six months' time? Peter Mandelson, Labour's election campaign director, evidently thinks it is possible. Last week he slipped away unnoticed at the beginning of the short parliamentary recess and paid a brief visit to the United States. He had a series of meetings fixed up with administration figures in Washington to discuss the fashionable topic of reinventing government. But he also had another, less official, mission,

to watch in person the second of the two Clinton-Dole television debates in the Shiley Theatre in San Diego. He talked to Clinton's staff about the awesomely detailed preparations the President had made for them, such as the use of Senator George Mitchell as a surrogate Bob Dole in rehearsals, and around a dozen spin doctors to fan out among the press after the 90-minute debate to explain just what success it had been for the incumbent. Not to mention Clinton's carefully prepared and thoughtful response to fend off seriously awkward questions and brickbats about everything from Indonesian donations to the Democrats to Whitewater. "No insult ever created a job or improved a school."

All that preparation, as it happens, may have been part of what has made the two Clinton-Dole events somewhat less memorable than the television debates in some of the nine presidential punch-ups that have gone by since a sweating Richard Nixon slugged it out with Jack Kennedy in 1960. (Radio listeners judged Nixon the victor but those watching on television plumped for Kennedy.) Neither of the candidates dropped a big clanger, connoisseurs have to recall Gerald Ford's whacky remark that Poland wasn't dominated by the Soviet Union, or Jimmy Carter saying that he had asked his daughter Amy what the big issue was in the election – a gaffe that immediately and truthfully spawned thousands of Republican



Donald Macintyre

Tony Blair wants it. The voters deserve it. And now even the Tories may see the wisdom of a live TV debate

pay a price for refusing.

The second of Major's highly successful question-and-answer session at the party conference in Bournemouth has convinced at least some of his strategists that he could perform very well indeed, particularly in the kind of "town meeting" setting, similar to the one in San Diego, with a randomly sampled audience of ordinary voters asking questions.

The third is that if Major starts the campaign well behind in the polls then he has very little to lose – and possibly, if Tony Blair should falter, a lot to gain. Yesterday wasn't Major's best day, but you can imagine circumstances in which Major might want a debate more than Blair, and Blair having made the call couldn't possibly refuse.

And the fourth is that surely it's high time it happened. It's extraordinary, when you think about it, that after 36 years of campaign television debates in the US, we still don't have them here. The electors deserve something over and above the carefully arranged early-morning press conferences, armies of spin doctors, stagey national tours and mind-bending party political broadcasts using all the skills of modern television advertising. A studio audience of voters would be nicer and perhaps wiser than the braying backbenchers of yesterday. Why shouldn't the television viewers be able to compare and contrast? And just for good measure why not throw in a deputies' debate with Michael Heseltine and John Prescott. Now, that would be fun.

Call me a drooling pervert, but I've become obsessed with Barbie dolls. I love the way they're manufactured to embody, in nine species of plastic, the supposed dreams and career plans of today's girls; and the way, in the interests of offering an eclectic portfolio of hobbies to the nation's seven-year-olds, the manufacturers keep coming up with more and more ridiculous things for her to do. With the help of my indefatigable assistant, Sophie (nine), I've identified: Mountain-Climbing Barbie, Skiing Barbie, Magic Songbird Barbie, Twirling Ballerina Barbie, Beach and Lifeguard Barbie, Barbie and Her Horse Nibbles, Teacher Barbie and Mermaid Barbie. Then there are the smutty variants for aspirant good-time girls – Gymnastic Barbie, and "Overnight Barbie With Overnight Bag" and, I dare say, one or two bags under her eyes as well ...

This platitude should impress the doll-buying world as pretty enlightened, far from being a stereotypical ditzy model-girl Barbie scenario to represent a career-advice department. But nothing can impress the stern mullahs of Iran's toy industry. The state-owned Children Cultural Promotion Centre (a kind of fundamentalist Early Learning Centre) is setting out to protect its innocent youth from the pernicious influence of "Barbie culture", by designing dolls in appropriate dress. Hence "Islamic Barbie", or "Sara", pictured here, complete with chador, demure costume, black hair, devout expression and single eyebrow. Cuter, isn't she? I expect Hamleys' window will soon be full of advanced versions: infidel Barbie (with detachable



john
walsh

Your children are my business

by Sara Maitland



Most abuse occurs within the home by family members or parents' friends. This statistic is widely accepted and consistently ignored

commission has gone far enough. The well-being of all children is my business; is everybody's business. The change in cultural attitude that we ought to be seeking is not that we should stop minding our own business, but that we should start doing so.

It is my financial business. The children now in primary school will be the workers who will pay for my pension, my health care, my community services when I am old. If they are not my business now, why should I be theirs then? If I do not make them my business now, will they be fit and able to

make me theirs? At an even more basic level, care for the victims of abuse and cruelty is expensive: some practical "ounce of prevention" work could save me, as a taxpayer, money.

It is my social business. As Simon Hughes, the Liberal Democrat health spokesman, has put it: "If we are going to deal with the social disruption caused by young people, then we must first deal with the social disruption caused to young people." Why should the young skateboarder who careers towards me scarily fast give a toss about my feelings, if

they to, or are rude to children (and a failure to listen to someone speaking to you is at the very least bad-mannered) then will ignore, at best, or be rude to adults. If they are not treated as citizens, why should we expect them to behave like citizens? If their education is not resourced properly, is not treated with respect, why should they respect teachers or other authorities? If I regard their bodies and minds (usually their only property) as none of my business, are they likely to treat my body or property any differently?

It is my civic business. All citizens have a duty to prevent crime. Fear is not regarded by the courts – as we saw this week – as a sufficient reason for not giving evidence. (The two women who had used this argument had their sentences reduced; they were not acquitted.) Cruelty to, and abuse of, children is a crime. We have an obligation not just to report such a crime when we believe it to be occurring, but to take reasonable action to prevent it. I am the mother of two children: there are a whole range of actions against them which I would intervene personally over, or would report to the police and expect them to act on: abuse, bullying, intimidation, threats, for example. That seems a reasonable standard to start with – if it was "my" child would I do anything? Would I want someone else to? When the answer is "yes", I should be prepared to do the same for other children.

It is also, dare I say it, my moral business. Children are not the possessions of their parents. They are not to be equated with cars or televisions. They are not private property. People cannot be private property – in any other context that would be called slavery. Children are people, and they have the same rights as any other human being; they are just especially and specifically vulnerable. A community that will not vigilantly defend the rights of its most vulnerable members is a community whose freedoms are at risk. This is an issue of democracy.

Children are my business; they are everyone's business. In not acting on their behalf we are failing to protect our own interests, long and short-term. There are fascinating questions about how we lost touch with this obvious fact, but whatever the answers we have lost touch with it. If we are serious about stopping the abuse of children, we need to re-learn it fast.

LIFE'S A LOTTERY



When you buy a lottery ticket, you've a one in 14 million chance of winning the jackpot. The chances that you may experience some form of rheumatic disease are rather greater.

As many people in Britain today know, arthritis can cause severe crippling joint damage to hands and wrists. Feet, knees, hips, shoulders, elbows, jaw and neck can also be affected, causing unrelenting pain and disability.

The Arthritis and Rheumatism Council is the only major UK charity financing medical research into osteoarthritis and rheumatic diseases at most university hospitals and medical schools in the UK.

Unlike the lottery, successful research programmes aren't dependent on chance. We need your help to increase our odds of finding a cure for these destructive diseases.

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Murdoch mortgages BSkyB stake

Matthew Horsman
and Derek Pain

Rupert Murdoch is planning to mortgage up to £1.25bn worth of his shares in BSkyB, the high-flying satellite broadcaster, to finance digital TV development plans elsewhere in his global media empire.

News America Holdings, a US-based subsidiary of Mr Murdoch's News Corporation, is seeking to raise as much as \$2bn through an issue of preference shares, convertible at a pre-determined price into

shares of BSkyB, Britain's most profitable broadcaster.

The issue would be convertible into as much as 11 per cent of BSkyB, or more than a quarter of Mr Murdoch's 40 per cent stake in the company.

In the first instance, Merrill Lynch, which is placing the issue, is seeking to raise about \$1bn, but "greenshoe" provisions mean the total financing could be double that.

The issue, which would carry a dividend of about 5 per cent, will be priced next week. The proceeds are thought to be car-

marked for the development of Mr Murdoch's digital TV plans in the US and Asia.

Normally, such preference shares would be convertible into shares of the issuing company or its parent.

The stock will be convertible at a premium of about 20 per cent to the price of BSkyB shares at the time of issue, and will be redeemable after five years.

Mr Murdoch's News America Holdings will have the right to offer converting stockholders cash instead of shares,

equivalent to the then ruling BSkyB share price.

According to sources familiar with the financing, the move represents a bet by Mr Murdoch that he will be able to afford to retire the shares at their conversion date, possibly within five years, even if the shares soar well above the pre-set conversion price. That way, he would avoid seeing his 40 per cent stake in BSkyB diluted when the shares became convertible.

Shares in BSkyB dropped 42.5p yesterday to close at 636p, as rumours of the share issue be-

gan to circulate through the market.

Dealers said the sharp drop was also in reaction to fears that the new cable telephone and TV group, Cable & Wireless Communications, would pose a competitive threat to BSkyB. Some dealers were also concerned that the financing might mean Mr Murdoch was backing away from his commitment to BSkyB.

But it is understood that Mr Murdoch is convinced he can use the funds to finance rapid growth of his other global TV interests, earning a return that

is robust enough to more than cover the costs of redeeming the preference stock even if BSkyB shares soar far above the conversion price.

The two most likely targets of the fresh funds are Star-TV, Mr Murdoch's Asian pay-TV service, and ASkyB, the US-based company that is jointly developing a digital satellite service with US partners.

The special convertible shares, developed by Merrill Lynch, have been marketed to other big corporations in need of fresh funds.

According to informed sources, Merrill Lynch has also approached Granada, which is working to reduce the debt pile it amassed following its takeover of Forte, the hotels and restaurants group early this year.

Senior executives of Granada, which has an 11 per cent stake in BSkyB, met Merrill Lynch earlier this year to outline the attractions of raising funds via preference shares convertible into BSkyB stock. Granada is believed to be reviewing ways it can "collate-

rise" its BSkyB holding, which is worth more than £1bn.

Analysts said last night that the preference shares could be attractive to institutions which have been underweighted in BSkyB shares. Because only 25 per cent of the company's stock trades freely, there have been acute shortages of available shares for index-linked funds and other City institutions.

Such shortages have been one reason for BSkyB's rapid rise on the stock market.

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BT plans radical internal shake-up

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

The vogue for corporate restructuring sweeping across British industry has taken hold with a vengeance at BT, with news that the company is implementing a radical plan to split its internal structure into 40 or 50 separate business units.

Fresh from the dramatic programme of staff redundancies, which has seen the workforce shrink from 240,000 to 125,000 in just seven years, the company is now introducing a radical programme to introduce a full-scale internal market.

Each division involved will act as a stand-alone business with its own profit and loss account and the ability to outsource some operations to other companies. BT said yesterday that

who joined the company at the beginning of the year from the ICL computer group. Within weeks Sir Peter had criticised the staff culture within BT's London headquarters which still has elements of civil service

Jeff Richardson, the director of the internal-market project confirmed that similar and unpopular reforms carried out at the BBC had been studied before BT's reorganisation began earlier this year. He said several lessons had been learnt from the BBC approach.

"We're going forward in an evolutionary way ... we don't want to take people's eyes off the ball while the changes are going ahead," Mr Richardson said.

He insisted the reforms were not the first step towards privatising activities off. "We are already required by our licence to buy and sell internally," he explained.

The reorganisation is being discussed with BT's main trade union, the Union of Communication Workers, which is determined to ensure it prevents each business unit negotiating wages and conditions separately. Tony Young, the CWU's joint general secretary, said he believed an agreement with management had been secured, though the detailed still needed to be thrashed out.

"The jury is still out on these changes. What it will mean over the next five years we've yet to learn. The real challenge is to continue with collective bargaining," he said.

Separately it has also emerged that BT is to reorganise its complex structure of job grades and responsibilities, heralding a move to multi-skilling which has also been a feature of the changes at the BBC.

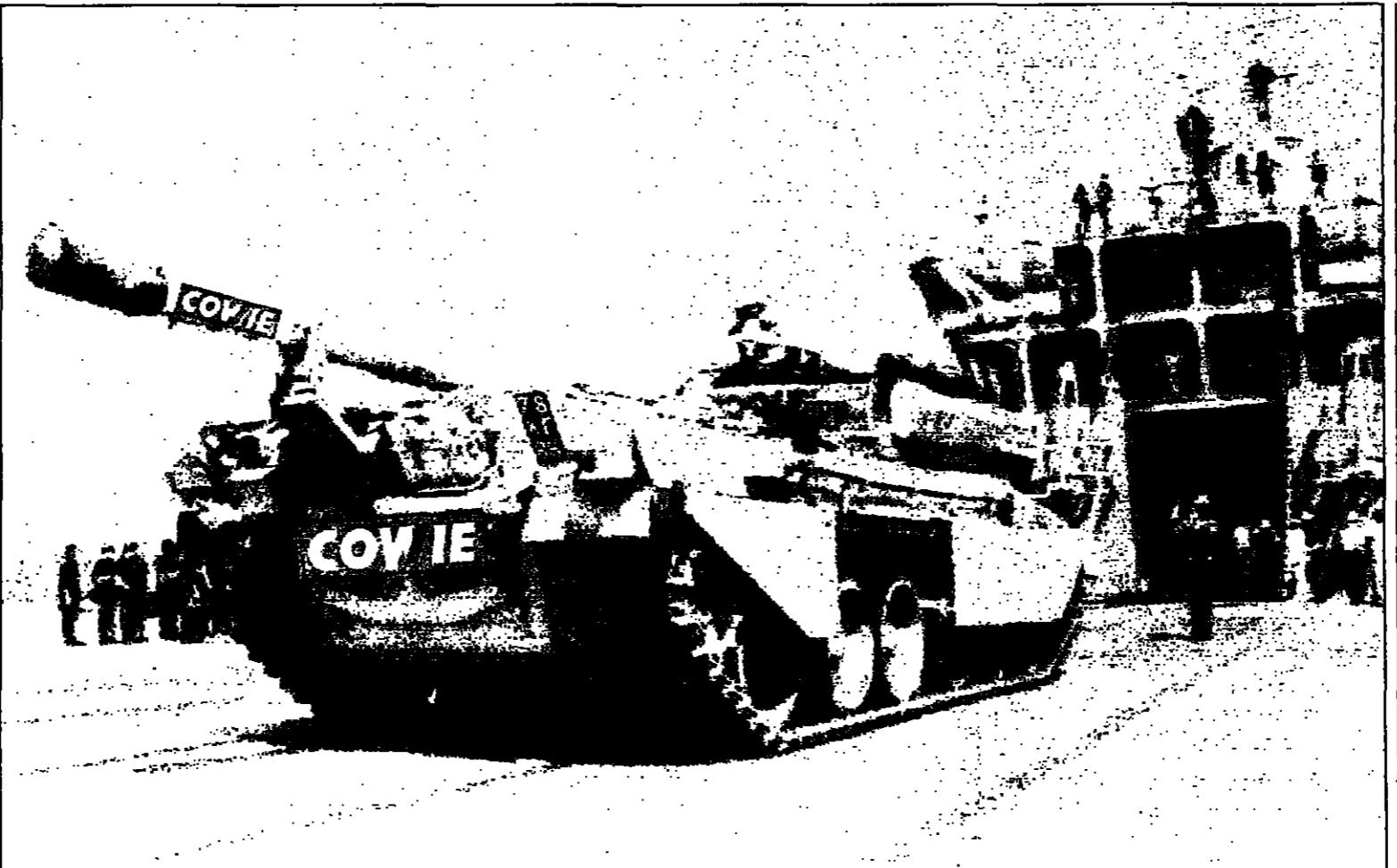
The existing grading structure, a throwback to pre-privatisation days when BT's job descriptions were written along civil service lines, separates engineers, clerical staff and the dwindling number of operators.

Sir Peter Bonfield: Criticised staff culture at London HQ

the aim was emphatically not to cut jobs beyond the existing reductions in staffing levels and instead there were no specific targets for cost savings.

It is the biggest internal upheaval since "Project Sovereign" in 1990, which swept away BT's traditional structure based on geographic lines and replaced it with divisions such as personal communications or business services.

The changes have been strongly backed by Sir Peter Bonfield, BT's chief executive



Into battle: Cowie is in talks with the Ministry of Defence that could see it owning the Challenger tanks used by front-line troops

Cowie in talks with MoD over tank leasing

Jill Treanor
Banking Correspondent

Opposition is mounting in the City to radical proposals by the Securities and Futures Authority (SFA) which would allow it to discipline senior executives if their firms go bust.

The existing grading structure, a throwback to pre-privatisation days when BT's job descriptions were written along civil service lines, separates engineers, clerical staff and the dwindling number of operators.

Most controversial of all is the move by the SFA to shift the burden of proof in disciplinary cases, so senior executives will have to prove they acted correctly rather than the SFA having to prove they failed in their duties.

The proposals were born out of frustration and public outcry at the SFA's inability to discipline the two men who ran Barings when it collapsed last year - Peter Baring, the chairman, and his deputy, Andrew Tuckey.

The SFA is proposing that senior executives take responsibility for "serious financial damage" to a firm or its reputation.

That is too wide a definition for many. "Our members' difficulty is with the combination of reversing the burden of proof and the fact they go further than the case where the future of the financial firm is threatened by serious management failure," said Peter Beales, director at the London Investment Bankers Association.

Peter Vipond, assistant director at the British Bankers Association, said:

"It's not just down to naming an individual. We need a more sophisticated framework for the management of risk within firms. The SFA's proposals may not help that."

At a recent seminar run by Coopers & Lybrand, the accountancy firm, to discuss the changes, 65 firms turned up and only two or three believed they required no changes.

Nick Duracher, chairman of the SFA, was expecting the proposals to cause controversy

wide range of equipment from forklift trucks to large conveyor belt systems costing up to £250,000 each. "People were surprised we could do a deal with the materials-handling equipment," Mr Blower said. "But we're a financial company. We can manage any piece of equipment and save the taxpayer money."

He admitted that talks were only preliminary and said it might take several years to agree the terms of any deal, which might involve Cowie obtaining an international arms dealing licence so it could dispose of equipment at the end of the agreed term.

The rulings of the authority could be challenged through the courts but they would not be subject to examination by the Council of Ministers, as the decision of DG4's mergers task force are at present.

In Britain the plan is already being opposed by the Confederation of British Industry, the House of Lords select committee on the European Community and the Office of Fair Trading.

John Bridgeman, director general of the OFT, said: "To treat competition law and cartels as something that is only the province of an independent body and the courts is a little dangerous. Parliament and ministers must be allowed to exercise authority and control." It is unrealistic to think competition issues can be kept free from political considerations because other interests have to be taken into account such as employment, cultural and defence considerations.

Karel van Miert, the EU Competition Commissioner, has also launched a withering attack on the German proposal. A background briefing document warns that the move to an independent cartel authority would uncouple competition matters from the rest of EU policy and weaken the promotion of the single market as a result.

He also warned that it would in effect mean the creation of two competition authorities since DG4 would still be responsible for state monopolies and state aid.

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Banks seek pay curbs to stop traders from taking risks

Jill Treanor
Banking Correspondent

Leading bankers are preparing the groundwork for a common standard for pay awards in the City, as a way of preventing traders from taking too many risks as they chase substantial annual bonuses.

The bankers plan to hold a formal meeting around Christmas, a move prompted by

mounting concern in the City about the way - and the amounts - traders are paid.

The main fear is that these annual bonuses, which can double or even triple already substantial salaries, could encourage traders to take on too much risk and threaten the stability of their firms as in the high-profile collapse of Barings last year.

"It could be argued that some

traders are paid to take on more risk because it generates a lot of revenues," said Peter Vipond, assistant director of the British Bankers Association, which is organising the symposium.

The bankers' aim is to foster debate on the sensitive issue and one of the goals could be to encourage reward systems based on the risks taken by traders, often the youngest and highest-

paid members of a banking team, as well as the revenues they generate.

"A trader making half-a-million dollars taking no risk is doing more good than a trader who made million but bet the bank," Mr Vipond said.

Regulators pay close attention to the basis on which City traders are rewarded, but have no plans to introduce draconian rules on remuneration. And

any such moves would be strongly resisted by the industry on the grounds of commercial interference by the banking and securities regulators - the Bank of England and the Securities and Futures Authority.

Pay deals are highly competitive in the City and are often used by firms to poach staff from competitors. This caused controversy earlier this year when ING Barings hit out

against rival Deutsche Morgan Grenfell after it poached a trading team, saying such action pushed up pay deals unduly.

Generally, banks go to great lengths to monitor risks taken by their traders and take a tougher stance than is required by regulation.

The eventual conclusion of the discussions among banks could lead to a reappraisal of pay deals and a consensus over

bonuses being averaged out over a period of years or paid a year behind, for instance.

The Bank of England takes account of banks' pay schemes to watch for incentive schemes which encourage too much risk.

He also warned that it would in effect mean the creation of two competition authorities since DG4 would still be responsible for state monopolies and state aid.

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STOCK MARKETS					
FTSE 100			Dow Jones*		
4162			2110		
4080	4075	4070	2090	2085	2080
4000	3980	3960	2070	2050	2030
3920	3900	3880	2050	2030	2010
3840	3820	3800	2030	2010	1990
3760	3740	3720	2010	1990	1970
3680	3660	3640	1990	1970	1950
3600	3580	3560	1970	1950	1930
3520	3500	3480	1950	1930	1910
3440	3420	3400	1930	1910	1890
3360	3340	3320	1910	1890	1870
3280	3260	3240	1890	1870	1850
3200	3180	3160	1870	1850	1830
3120	3100	3080	1850	1830	1810
3040	3020	3000	1830	1810	1790
2960	2940	2920	1810	1790	1770
2880	2860	2840	1790	1770	1750
2800	2780	2760	1770	1750	1730
2720	2700	2680	1750	1730	1710
2640	2620	2600	1730	1710	1690
2560	2540	2520	1710	1690	1670
2480	2460	2440	1690	1670	1650
2400	2380	2360	1670	1650	1630
2320	2300	2280	1650	1630	1610
2240	2220	2200	1630	1610	1590
2160	2140	2120	1610	1590	1570
2080	2060	2040	1		